



# THE STREAM OF MUSIC





*[Courtesy of Mrs. Emma Reifenberg]*

### JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Portrait by Elias Gottlieb Haussmann, painted in 1723 and lost for almost 140 years. The only known portrait of the composer as a young man.

THE STREAM  
OF  
*Music*

By  
RICHARD ANTHONY LEONARD .

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# Preface



THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK IS TO TRACE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART OF MUSIC during the past three hundred years. My method has been to use as a basis the lives and personalities of the great composers who made this music. The particular period (roughly 1650 to the present) is a fairly obvious choice: it represents the most resplendent age in the whole history of music, the age that produced a very high percentage of the important works which are performed today and in which public interest is centred.

I should say at the outset that one of my primary aims has been to simplify and to restrict. The main stream of music, so to speak, is kept always in the foreground. The men whose work forms its main tributaries are discussed in detail; the rest are often ignored. I have simplified otherwise, too. Music is a complex art, with innumerable problems of a highly technical nature which must be understood if the composer's work is to be appreciated. These technical aspects cannot be ignored; they must be met head on. I have therefore discussed many of them freely and sometimes at length; at the same time I have tried to avoid the minutiae, the blueprint details that interest only the professional musician.

"Nature will have its course," said Cervantes; "every production must resemble its author. . . ." Conversely, if we are to find the meaning of any piece of music, the reasons for its peculiar form and style, we must look to the artist himself. That is why, in discussing these composers, I have tried to describe them both as men and artists—to sketch their lives and personalities, their historical backgrounds, the important events (both inward and outward) which shaped their thoughts and so governed their creative impulses.

As to the choice of composers, there are several omissions that I regret, but the line had to be drawn. In the main, the greatest composers and those responsible for the most significant forward movements in music were the ones selected. Another consideration was the extent to which the public is interested in a man's music today. I was sorry to omit Handel, for instance, but his music is almost lost today in comparison with Bach's. Gluck, Mendelssohn and Ravel were crowded out by their more important contemporaries—Haydn, Schumann and Debussy. For similar reasons Chopin was given a more extended

discussion than Berlioz, and Wagner much more space than Verdi. Of contemporary composers, those included are men whose creative effort, though not finished, is for critical purposes about summed up.

I take pleasure in recording here my indebtedness and my thanks to an old friend, Eric Hodgins, who read part of my manuscript in its early stages, and who gave me advice (both editorial and musical) which was of very great benefit to the entire book. I am also indebted to Mrs. Emma Reifenberg, for her kindness in permitting me to reproduce the recently discovered portrait of Bach. The reproduction of the Chopin daguerreotype is made with the kind permission of Mr. Courtlandt Palmer. To my wife must go a special measure of thanks, for encouragement, patience, and understanding that never seemed to run out.

R. A. L.

*Larchmont, N.Y.*

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*All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments,  
It is not the violins and the cornets, it is not the oboe nor the beating drums, nor  
the score of the baritone singer singing his sweet romanza, nor that of the  
men's chorus, nor that of the women's chorus,  
It is nearer and farther than they.*

WALT WHITMAN.

# Introduction



ANYTHING DEEPER THAN A SUPERFICIAL UNDERSTANDING OF MUSIC TODAY MUST come from knowledge of the people who have dominated it so long. The first requisite therefore is a backward glance into the recesses of German history—to the middle of the seventeenth century, when a thin stream of music began to flow from that perpetually disturbing land which lies between the Alps and the plains of Denmark. The stream grew into a torrent, fed all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by one man of genius after another, until it became one of the most fabulously productive movements in the history of any art. Today, unless all signs fail, it has dropped again to the merest trickle, the impulses which originally called it into being having disappeared as mysteriously as they began.

This supreme development of the music art has a curious and in all probability an immensely significant place in history. It lies almost precisely between two gigantic wars—between the close of the Thirty Years' War in 1648 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. That period marks the rise and fall, not alone of the art which remains the finest creation of the German people in their whole history, but of the nation itself. The present hideous state of Germany, the ruination of its moral character, the pollution of its entire intellectual life, is not a sudden act of self-destruction climaxing the misfortunes of a few decades. The causes extend back at least three centuries, to a conflict which threatened for a time to exterminate the peoples of central Europe.

The Thirty Years' War was the last and worst of all the religious wars which Europe suffered with the coming of the Reformation. It broke out in Bohemia in 1618, when a Holy Roman Emperor tried to suppress the Protestants. It spread slowly over central Europe, gathering in intensity and fury. After Catholic and Protestant Germans had mauled each other horribly the war took on political significance, in which all the greater powers of Europe gradually became embroiled. The Holy Roman Empire of the Hapsburgs was supported by Catholic Spain; against them in support of the Protestants of Germany were finally ranged Sweden, Denmark, England, and France.

As the war dragged on, with first one side and then the other gaining the upper hand, the population of Germany was slowly clawed to death. The first negotiations for a general peace were begun in 1642, after a quarter of a century

of conflict ; but the problems of settlement were so involved that six years went by before the end came. The Peace of Westphalia, signed on October 24, 1648, is one of the jutting promontories of history. It put an end for many years to wholesale religious persecution ; it broke the power of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, establishing France as the dominant state of Europe ; it ended the power of the medieval Church of Rome as a possible unifying force in Christian Europe.

The Thirty Years' War left the Germanic states in indescribable chaos. At least a quarter and possibly a half of their population had been killed. Towns and villages by the hundreds were wiped out of existence by the plundering armies of both factions. Ruinous taxes and war levies drained away the wealth of the people until industry and agriculture both were paralysed. Thousands of men, women, and children, facing starvation, became followers in the wakes of the armies. Some records of the misery and horror of the times even mention the practice of cannibalism.

Modern historians have sometimes questioned these frightful accounts of the Thirty Years' War, maintaining that the German historians of the nineteenth century themselves exaggerated the facts in their efforts to excuse the backward state of their nation in the years following the Peace of Westphalia. But there is no denying that the German Protestant states paid a terrible price for their religious freedom and their release from the domination of the Holy Roman Empire. For years they lay numb and beaten. They were disorganized—a mass of more than three hundred political entities, ranging from states the size of Bavaria to single free cities. Each had its own sovereign, its own coinage and taxation, its jealously guarded boundary lines. The people of these petty, quarrelling, disunited states remained poor for generations. The soil of Germany has always been the least productive of Europe, with few of the natural resources enjoyed by France, Britain, or Russia. The Germans also failed in the colonization and development of the New World. Lacking the strength and the enterprise of the nations to the West, they shared in none of the wealth that flowed into England, France, Spain, and the Netherlands from the Americas and the Indies.

Meanwhile, even during the blackest years of the war, the rest of Europe was surging forward with a new impulse which has marked the seventeenth century as one of the most remarkable in history. That century was in fact the placenta in which was nourished the present modern world. It was an age of great scientific, industrial, social, artistic, and philosophical advances—the age of Galileo, Bacon, and Descartes, of Spinoza, Newton, Harvey, Milton, Bunyan, Rembrandt, Racine, Torricelli, Velásquez. Men's ideas and social habits were undergoing a profound change. The new scientific method, based on reason and experiment, had opened the doors to modern chemistry, medicine, biology, and metallurgy. In the course of a few generations the man of Europe was given a new conception of himself and of the world and universe in which he lived. The Americas and the Indies were sending him a steady stream of new foods to eat, beverages to drink, materials to process. In England were being hatched the first ideas of a new political freedom. Barely three months after the Peace of Westphalia, Charles I was beheaded by his own subjects. From that moment the divine right of kings would begin to give ground to the rights of man ; monarchy would slowly dissolve before a rising modern democracy.

The reader who surveys the broad panorama of that tremendous century can hardly fail to observe how small a part the Germanic states contributed to

its progress. The centres of the new intellectual energy were England, the Netherlands, and France, with Spain and Italy slowly receding from the flood tide of their high Renaissance. It required more than two hundred years for the Germans to recover from the exhaustion and impoverishment caused by the Thirty Years' War. They were not even politically united until 1871—the last of the great peoples of Europe to achieve a national unity. One of the most sinister effects of the long ordeal was the sense of inferiority which gradually became rooted in the German mentality. At first this was manifested by a wholesale importation of ideas from foreign sources. In the century after the Peace of Westphalia the shining sun of Europe was France, and in no country was French culture copied more assiduously than in Germany. German writers loaded their works with French phrases; every German prince aped in his Teutonic way the court of Louis XIV; many of them disdained their own language and spoke only French. The North Germans also turned for culture and enlightenment to the Netherlands. It was typical of the times that Frederick William, the Great Elector of Brandenburg, was sent as a boy of fifteen to Leyden for an education. In the south, Italy was still a centre of the cultural world, and from that source came many of the German ideas on art and music.

## II

The seventeenth century was the era of baroque art. It was the age dominated in painting by the Netherlands—the Flemish school of Rubens, the Breughel family, and Van Dyck; the Dutch school of Hals, Ruysdael, and Rembrandt. Portraiture, landscape, and genre painting all reached a new climax. But the spirit of the baroque was nowhere manifested more fully than in music.

Practically every phase of the art of music as it developed in seventeenth-century Europe is indicative of the spirit epitomized by the term "baroque": it was ornamental in the extreme, opulent, extravagant, fantastic, complex in design and bold in imagination, richly expressive and at times rhapsodically free. While this baroque style was growing and exfoliating, another and more fundamental change in the art was also taking place. For centuries music had been under the domination of the Church. With the coming of the seventeenth century composers began to search for new avenues of expression. They were tired of the age-old formulas for church music based on choral polyphony; like the navigators and the scientists of their day, they wanted to explore and to invent. Before them, like the vast untouched continent of the Americas, lay the field of secular music; and into this they proceeded with bold steps.

One of the most important of the new developments was the rise of the keyboard instruments—the various claviers and the organ. At the beginning of the seventeenth century these instruments were still in a comparatively primitive state; at its end they were a dependable and resourceful musical means, with a splendid literature awaiting their command. The same was true of other individual instruments—especially the members of the viol family.

By far the most spectacular development in secular music was the invention of the opera, which took place in Italy shortly before 1600. The rise of this new form of entertainment is reminiscent of the strange crazes which seized the populations of Europe at various times during the Middle Ages. Opera spread through Italy like wildfire, until there was hardly a city or town which did not support a number of operatic theatres (either public or in private homes), while a small

army of composers was kept busy turning out operatic scores with the speed of commercial artisans. Soon Italian opera became so conventionalized that its whole point and purpose was to show off a new and splendid vocal art. Here again was a clear manifestation of the spirit of the baroque, for the more ornamental, florid, extravagant, and difficult the aria, the more wildly the singer would be acclaimed by the audience. Opera singers achieved a point of fame and public adulation reserved in other ages for gladiators and motion-picture stars. The *castrati*, or male sopranos, created by a revolting practice of mutilation when they were boys, were the most popular performers of all. The schools of singing which grew up at the time in Italy remain unsurpassed in thoroughness and excellence.

Within a century Italian opera had swamped the music of Europe. Its domination was so complete that to this day the nomenclature and terminology of music are still basically Italian.

Not all the energies of the Italian composers were concentrated on the opera. There was still a vigorous school of church composers whose art was based on the old traditions. Here too the spirit both of the baroque and of bold invention asserted itself. Frescobaldi (1583-1644), the organist at St. Peter's in Rome, was the most celebrated instrumentalist of his time. He drew audiences of thirty thousand people. His style was typical of the era—a mastery of the older polyphonic forms, of fugue, and chorale variation, plus an inventive genius for rich and varied harmony, brilliant improvisation and rhapsodic personal expression. The Catholic Mass itself, once the vessel of Palestrina's rarefied polyphony, took on the new musical vestments of baroque ornamentation and colour. At the height of the period of the so-called "colossal baroque" the choir of singers (to quote Paul Henry Láng) "was joined and supported by an orchestra of viols, trombones, trumpets, cornets, and organs, playing either independently or with voices"—a concordance of timbres and a range of dynamics which must have awed the worshippers of that day with its gorgeousness.

It was inevitable that the influence of Italian music should invade the German states of the seventeenth century, when even the more vigorous nations like France and England succumbed completely, especially to the fascination for Italian opera. The Catholic Germans of the south and the Austrians welcomed the invasion. Vienna became a centre of Italian opera, dominated by Italian composers and singers down to the time of Mozart. Protestant Germany, however, remained an island of resistance, one of the few places in Europe where the new Italian entertainment affected but did not overwhelm the native product. This fact was one of great importance to the future history of music, for from this stubborn assertion of individuality in a comparatively limited locality grew the most magnificent musical structure in history.

No historian has ever explained why, out of the misery and wreckage of the Thirty Years' War, German music alone should have remained alive, when practically every other cultural activity lay paralysed. German painting, by contrast, almost disappeared throughout the seventeenth century and for half of the eighteenth, and literature did not fare much better. Possibly the reason lies in the connection between music and the two religions over which the frightful war had been fought. In the Catholic Church music had been for centuries the handmaiden of ceremony; the same was true in the Lutheran Protestant Church, whose old hymns and chorales, many of them coming from the Reformer himself, were an indispensable part of every church service. Thus in Germany,

after three decades of a wasting conflict, the institution of music in the churches was one of the few solaces left for a weary and dejected people.

The first genius who could be said to herald the coming importance of German music was Heinrich Schütz. Born in Saxony in 1585, exactly one hundred years before Johann Sebastian Bach, Schütz began his musical career like many of the most famous—as a choirboy. He became an organist of repute, and then court conductor at Dresden. He made several visits to Italy for purposes of study, and he escaped some of the worst times of the Thirty Years' War by living in Copenhagen. Schütz became the most influential composer of German church music of the mid-seventeenth century. His historical importance lay in the fact that he imported from Italy musical ideas which impressed him profoundly. He infused the severe old German forms with a new and more dramatic style, and hence a deeper expressiveness.

Before Schütz died (in 1672) the beginnings of a strong new musical art were already evident in Germany. Its centre of gravity was a school of church organists who operated chiefly in the Lutheran churches. In modern times the names of these men have become dimmed under the shadow of their descendant, Johann Sebastian Bach, but in the latter years of the seventeenth century they had already carved out an art which surpassed the best that Italy was then producing. In their seriousness of purpose, their mastery of a complex technique, in the depth of their emotional responses, these men made the other music of their time seem thin and even frivolous.

One of the first of the fraternity was Franz Tunder (1614–1667), who was born and died in the ancient Hanseatic town of Lübeck, on the North Sea. As a young man he had studied with Frescobaldi at Rome, returning to his native city to become organist at the old Church of St. Mary's. Tunder set about imitating the magnificent choral and instrumental choirs he had heard in Italy, by training a group of violin, viola, and wind-instrument players to perform with the organ and the choir.

Tunder was succeeded by the most famous of all pre-Bach organ composers, Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707). This fiery young Scandinavian took over the post at St. Mary's when, according to the custom, he married Tunder's daughter. (This curious convention made at least one pivotal change in the course of music history. Years later, when it became Buxtehude's turn to retire, one of the candidates to succeed him was eighteen-year-old George Frederick Handel, of Cassel, who declined after he had met Buxtehude's twenty-eight-year-old daughter. Handel turned away from an organ career, becoming instead the master of oratorio and of opera in the Italian style in the early eighteenth century.) Buxtehude set a new standard of organ virtuosity. He also enlarged the scope of Tunder's instrumental group to establish the *Abendmusiken* (evening musicals), which were in effect concerts held in the church. They became musical events of the first order, to which other organists made pilgrimages from all parts of Germany. Buxtehude had a profound influence upon Bach. He was a rugged individualist who dared to play and compose brilliantly and with more freedom and invention than any of his fellows.

Other contemporaries of Buxtehude were Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706), who held various posts both in the north and south of Germany; and Jan Adam Reinken, the organist of St. Catherine's at Hamburg, who was born in 1623 and lived to be ninety-nine. These men were outstanding in their fraternity, but there were many others—the German churches were in fact full of musicians of exceptional skill.



It is interesting to note how this northern phase of the musical art combined two elements which would seem on their face to be irreconcilable—the ancient hymn tunes of the Lutheran Church and the wildly luxuriant baroque style. The hymns and the chorales which had come down from the time of Luther himself were fine old tunes, symmetrical and plain, deeply devotional but simple enough to be sung by the congregation. After the sermon itself they were the most important feature of every Lutheran church service. Naturally they were the bones and sinews of every organist's equipment. Just as the baroque architects took the simplest blocks and reared them into buildings of great amplitude and fantastically complex ornamentation, so these organists used their hymn tunes—as a point of departure for all sorts of elaborate, highly decorative musical forms.

Most of the baroque forms were based on the variation principle: the chorale prelude, the passacaglia, the chaconne, and the supreme example of all—the fugue—were all a proliferation of many decorative ideas from a single basic theme. The toccata was a showpiece, a swirling mass of figuration to show off the player's digital skill; while the fantasia was a challenge both to the composer's imagination and the organist's artistry at registration.

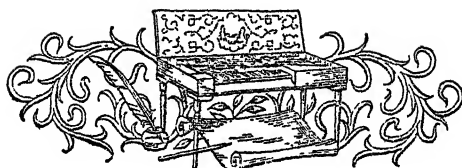
The organs themselves were typical products of the baroque era, with their several manuals and pedals, their scores of stops, their endless multiplication of sounds and timbres. The greatest of these seventeenth-century instruments (Buxtehude's at Lübeck had fifty-four stops) were nothing less than mechanical and aesthetic triumphs, as they were also mirrors of the bold imagination of the players.

Circumstance as well as tradition helped to form the character of these North German organists and to produce their art, so pregnant for all music of the future. The mastery of organ playing and composition was a lifework of enormous difficulty; to hold a post in a large church demanded a man of talent and training, to say nothing of intellect. With his responsibility went dignity, and a matchless inspiration. From his organ gallery he might look down the nave of some ancient Gothic structure, with its soaring piers and arches, its incredibly high mullioned windows; ranged in the galleries along the sides were his choir and perhaps the instrumentalists; under his hands and feet was an organ whose ringing voice could fill the vast church. All this apparatus of visual and musical beauty was at his command, and in the service which celebrated the glory of God he was second only to the minister or priest. It would have been a man of small soul indeed who did not respond to such a stimulus.

The time and all circumstances were ripe, therefore, for the production of genius; and as the seventeenth century drew to a close he appeared in the person of a young organist from Thuringia. He was one of the Bach family, the most famous clan of musicians in all Germany.

*Bach*

1685-1750



THE MIGHTY FORTRESS OF THE ART OF MUSIC, JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, STILL stands like a challenge to the modern world.

There is no longer any question of appreciation; the present age is ravenous for Bach's music. More has been written about him in the past few decades than about any other composer. His music has surpassed even Beethoven's as the most exhaustively studied and the most avidly played. As yet there is no sign of pause in the steadily widening scope of its popularity, or its enormous prestige. It is Bach the man who still escapes us. It is the personality of the artist, paled out by the passage of time, which has left unanswerable questions.

Bach's case is one of the rarest in art. In spite of his genius his work was not appreciated during his lifetime, for the reason that all music in that era was undergoing a deep-rooted change. During the years of his maturest productivity Bach had already become old-fashioned. When he died, what fame he had fell like a stone dropped into water. For the greater part of a century his works were forgotten, and some of them were lost. Only when a new generation of romantic composers, headed by Mendelssohn and Schumann, discovered old Sebastian Bach was it realized what a treasure-trove lay under the years of neglect. The music was slowly exhumed in all its splendour, like an Angkor Vat of a vanished age; but in those years of darkness something was lost—the essential personality of Bach the man.

One of the chief difficulties in the way of approach to this composer is the lack of human documents touching upon his personal life. The biographers got to Bach too late. Philipp Spitta, the German musicologist, began publication of his definitive work on the composer in 1873. He was followed by some of the best modern authorities—Parry, Schweitzer, and Terry—all of whom advanced notably the present-day appreciation of Bach's art. But in their efforts to reach the soul of the man they have all had to thumb through the same dry, meagre body of anecdote which is all that remains of first-hand evidence. Only a handful of Bach's letters remain in existence, and they are all of a business nature, pertaining to his career as organist and church cantor. There are no personal letters written by him to any member of his large family or even to any close personal friend. There are various descriptions by contemporaries of Bach the organist, but none of Bach the man. The main outlines

of the composer's life are known, but there are long stretches of years in which absolutely nothing is left, apart from the town in which he lived, a few details of the job he was filling, and the birth dates of his children.

The music itself only serves to increase one's sense of bewilderment. Its vastness, its detailed perfection through a range of size that extends from miniatures to veritable temples of sound, its fathomless emotional depth—the more these are studied the farther they seem to move beyond the capabilities of a single artist. The greatness of the spirit which emerges fails utterly to square up with the historical portrait of the modest Thuringian organ virtuoso, who preferred his family of children to fame, who lived most of his days in feudal quietude, and who explained his life's accomplishment by saying simply, "I worked hard."

Leibniz remarked about his enemy Newton: "Taking mathematics from the beginning of the world to the time when Newton lived, what he had done was much the better half." The same could be said of Bach. Compared with the entire body of music before his time, his own was the finer half. If that estimate seems extreme, the test is easily applied. If the present age had to decide between Bach's works and all the music written before him, there is no question of the overwhelming choice.

## II

Half-way between the Elbe and the Rhine and about one hundred miles south-west of Leipzig rises an ancient landmark—the Wartburg. From this castle in the heart of the Thuringian Forest has come a rich historical endowment, both for music and religion. It was the seat of the art-loving landgraves of Thuringia, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the German poets congregated there for their song contests. Walther von der Vogelweide, Wolfram von Eschenbach and other medieval minstrels visited the Wartburg and joined in the tourneys of song—scenes re-created by Richard Wagner in his opera *Tannhäuser*. There, too, the mighty struggle for religious liberty had its rise, for in the Wartburg Martin Luther took refuge after the Diet of Worms. In 1521 he worked at his translation of the Bible, and to this day personal relics of the Reformer are preserved in the castle.

A few miles to the north of the Wartburg lies the village of Eisenach. There, on the twenty-first of March, 1685, Johann Sebastian Bach was born. From the very soil of his native country were drawn the two profoundest impulses of the future composer's life—music, and a deep and abiding faith in the religion of his fathers.

The Bachs were the outstanding musical family of history. They were also the most prolific. For four generations before Johann Sebastian they had been organists, cantors, and town musicians in large numbers. In the early eighteenth century there were as many as thirty organists in Germany, all named Bach. Johann Sebastian himself had twelve sons and nine daughters by his two wives, and several of the sons became the most noted composers of their time.

Bach's father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, was a town musician, a highly respected performer on the violin and the viola. When Johann Sebastian was ten years old both his father and mother had died, so the care and education of the young orphan were entrusted to his older brother, Johann Christoph, who was twenty-four years old and already a musician of considerable attainments.

He was a church organist and in his youth had had the rare advantage of study with Johann Pachelbel.

Johann Sebastian lived with his brother for five years. During that time Johann Christoph taught him to play the harpsichord. The boy's unusual interest in music is indicated in one of the most frequently repeated anecdotes. The older brother had a valuable manuscript copy of works by Buxtehude, Pachelbel, Froberger, Böhm, and other noted organ composers. The manuscript was kept in a locked bookcase, and for some reason Johann Sebastian was not permitted to see it. He was so eager to study it, however, that he got it out secretly at night and set about copying it. As he could not use a candle he could work only on moonlight nights. After six months he had made a complete copy, but then his brother discovered what he was about and took the copy away from him.

At the age of fifteen Bach was sent to a convent school at Lüneburg, where he was a soprano in the choir until his voice broke. The organist at one of the churches in the town was Georg Böhm, a master of the art and a pupil of Jan Adam Reinken. Young Bach was so inspired by Böhm's prowess at the organ that he several times walked thirty miles from Lüneburg to Hamburg to hear the aged Reinken himself at first hand. He also walked sixty miles to Celle, where a celebrated *Kapelle* (or small orchestra) at the ducal court performed French music.

Bach thus had the advantage of first-rate teaching, which stemmed from direct contact with the royal line of North German organists, the most able musicians of his age. It is also evident that the serious youngster himself, greedy for music and willing to travel miles to hear it, was his own best teacher. Self-improvement was a passion which remained with him throughout his life. He never missed an opportunity to hear other noted musicians. He found keen enjoyment in the study of contemporary music, not only German but French and Italian; and because in those days printed music was scarce he did a vast amount of copying of other men's scores. Once he said candidly that his favourite method of stimulating himself to composition or improvisation was to begin by playing a favourite work of some other composer.

In 1703, when he was eighteen, Bach was already so proficient in his art that he was able to win the post of church organist in the town of Arnstadt, where he had at his disposal a fine organ of twenty-six stops. Towards the end of his second year he applied for a month's leave of absence. He proposed to make the longest of all his pilgrimages, a journey of two hundred miles northward to Lübeck, to hear the great Dietrich Buxtehude. What specifically attracted him was one of Buxtehude's festivals of religious music, the *Abendmusiken*. Here occurs one of the most exasperating of all the gaps in our knowledge of Bach's personal life. Nothing is known of this journey, which undoubtedly had to be made on foot and in the dead of winter; nothing is known of his experience at Lübeck. It is not certain whether he even met Buxtehude, whose work had such an influence on his own later style. He most certainly heard the Northern master play, for he stretched his leave of absence from one month to four.

Shortly after his return to Arnstadt, Bach was called upon the carpet to explain to the Consistorium the reasons for his prolonged absence. The minutes of that meeting are preserved, giving one of the few detailed accounts of an episode in the composer's life. The council asked him why he had left his post in the first place, and why he had so long overstayed his leave. Bach's answers were stubbornly evasive, so the council pressed another matter. It was

said that his work since his return had taken on an alarming aspect; his accompaniments of the hymns now included such "surprising variations" and "irrelevant ornaments" that the melody was obliterated and the congregation left in a state of confusion. Moreover, they accused him of neglecting to train his choir, and of allowing his young singers to leave the organ-loft during the sermon to visit a beer-house. They threatened to dismiss him if he did not mend his ways.

It is clear that the experience of hearing Buxtehude had set the young man's imagination afire. His hands and feet were running away with him at the organ; and his pen, busy in imitation of his hero, was consuming every moment he could spare from his duties. But he did not mend his ways. Already Arnstadt was getting too small for him.

Some months later Bach was again accused of neglecting choir practice, and of admitting a strange lady to the choir. He resigned, to become organist at the Church of St. Blasius in Mülhausen. His salary there was eighty-five gulden a year (about £8) plus allowances of corn, firewood, and fish. Thrown in for good measure was the use of a wagon to convey his household goods from Arnstadt.

During his stay of one year at Mülhausen, Bach married his cousin, Maria Barbara, who is believed to be the strange lady of the choir. Then in 1708 he had a stroke of good fortune. He received an appointment to the Court of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, as organist and chamber musician. Weimar was not strange to him, for as a young man of eighteen, just before he went to Arnstadt, he had spent several months there as a violinist in the Court orchestra. His return signalized the beginning of the first great period of his creative life.

### III

Weimar, the capital of the Grand Duchy of Saxe-Weimar, was to be glorified in a later age as "the German Athens", a seat of literature and music made illustrious by the names of Goethe, Schiller, and Liszt. When Bach went there in 1708 it was poor, provincial, and in all probability very dull. The reigning sovereign was Duke Wilhelm Ernst, a solitary man of abstemious if not wholly forbidding tastes. Personal frustrations had darkened his life, for he was estranged from his wife and his brother; but he found compensation in a lifelong devotion to religion. He loved theological discussions and was absorbed in the problems of the church and the clergy. The duke's sole secular passion seems to have been numismatics. The regimen of Court life was severe; everyone went to bed at nine o'clock in the summer and eight in the winter.

The record of Bach's personal life during his nine years at Weimar is an almost complete blank. It is known that as organist he performed on a small organ of twenty-five stops in the ducal chapel. He also played the harpsichord and the violin in the chamber orchestra. In 1714 he was made concertmaster of the orchestra. During these years at Weimar seven children were born to Maria Barbara, four of whom survived. Very little else is known of Bach in this period, except that he developed from a young man of talent to one of superlative genius. At Weimar he produced some of his most brilliant organ works, and there he extended his powers as organist and clavier player to a point of virtuosity that had never been equalled.

In view of the interest in Bach today, it is surprising that most of his organ

works still remain *terra incognita* to the average music lover. Actually they comprise but a small part of his gigantic output, yet modern organists are probably right in contending that they are his most personal works, the most intimate voicing of his feelings and aspirations. Certainly the most casual hearing of many of these pieces is all that is necessary to disprove the notion that Bach was a kind of musical machine, who turned out notes to mathematical formulae. Refuted too is the impression (unhappily perpetuated by many a frontispiece) that he was a man without humour, warmth, or the blood of life.

Consider such pieces as the "Jig" Fugue in G major, the Little Fugue in G minor, or the Prelude and Fugue in D major. If ever youthful exuberance and high spirits were captured in music it is surely in such essays as these. The Prelude and Fugue in D major especially is famous as an organist's showpiece—a whirling shower of notes, a hexentanz in the major mode, in which the usually ponderous organ moves with the speed and lightness of a fiddle.

The Toccata and Fugue in D minor is another virtuoso work, in a contrasting mood. Sombre, ominous, almost elemental in its gravity, but vitally dramatic, it presents all the aspects of modern "programme" music. Vast forces of nature seem to be at work. Scale passages rushing up and down the manuals at headlong speed alternate with chords of earth-shaking power, until the listener's mind is inevitably filled with pictures of the sea, the avalanche, and the thunderstorm. Anyone who thinks of Bach in terms of the dry or the academic need only hear the opening dozen bars or so of this work as a corrective.

Another showpiece of Bach's Weimar period is the Toccata in F. The word "toccata", based on the Italian word meaning "to touch", originally meant a free, fantasialike movement in which the fingers were given a thorough testing in rapidly moving scales and elaborate passage work—in short, a speed exercise. The Toccata in F is an example of Bach's ability to take such an uninspired, utilitarian form and build from it a monument of tonal splendour. A long movement of tremendous vigour and immense mural-like sweep, it taxes the powers of the greatest performers. It is also one of the best examples of Bach's powers of development, of taking a few basic musical ideas and expanding them prodigiously.

There was a special purpose behind the composition of these bravura pieces of Bach's Weimar period. His reputation as an organist began to spread, and he seems to have made tours almost every year to neighbouring towns and to courts, giving recitals and trying out new organs. For such occasions he had to develop a repertoire which would show off his organ technique. From all contemporary accounts it was an astonishing skill: "His fist was gigantic; he could stretch a twelfth with his left hand and perform running passages between with the three inner fingers." His finger dexterity was so smooth and effortless that "his hand was never weary and lasted out through a whole day's organ playing" . . . while "with his two feet he could perform on the pedals passages which would be enough to provoke many a skilled clavier player with five fingers". The organs of Bach's time, it must be remembered, often had actions so stiff that they would cripple the hands of most modern organists, used to effortless electrical actions.

Bach once gave a recital at Cassel before the Crown Prince who later became King Frederick of Sweden. It is believed that he performed his Toccata in C, which has a brilliant pedal solo. The stupefied Crown Prince snatched from his finger a ring set with precious stones and presented it to Bach on the spot. Someone else who was present remarked that Bach's feet "flew over the pedal

board as if they had wings; and the ponderous and ominous tones fell upon the ear of the hearer like thunder".

Another story of Bach's prowess concerns his encounter with J. L. Marchand, a celebrated French musician. Marchand was extremely proud of his reputation as a clavier player and improviser. He was the idol of Versailles, and in 1717 when he visited Dresden he created a sensation at the Court there. Bach happened to visit Dresden at the same time and some of his admirers conceived the idea of a contest between the two. Marchand and Bach agreed to meet, but when Bach arrived on the day of the joust and declared himself ready it was found that Marchand had left town that morning. It was believed that the Frenchman had availed himself secretly of an opportunity to hear Bach at practice, and that what he heard dismayed him.

From all accounts it would seem that no one ever approached Bach at the art of improvisation. Certainly no one of his time was better qualified to appraise his skill than the patriarch of all the North German organists—Jan Adam Reinken. In 1720, when he and Bach met in Hamburg for the last time, Reinken was ninety-seven years old, and his experience had extended back through the long era of the baroque in music. After listening to Bach extemporize for half an hour on the theme of the chorale, "An Wasserflüssen Babylon" ["By the Flowing Waters of Babylon"], Reinken embraced him and declared, "I thought that this art was dead, but I see it still lives in you." When asked by distinguished visitors for an exhibition of his skill, Bach could extemporize on a single theme for over an hour. First he would use the theme as the basis for a prelude and fugue; then he would combine and interweave it with some familiar chorale melody; finally he would use it as the subject of a fugue for full organ, often combining the original theme with other themes derived from it.

#### IV

Towards the end of Bach's term at Weimar a decided change became apparent in his organ music. He had passed the years of his youth and his interest in brilliance and show began to decline. As his art matured his ideas became more serious and contemplative. He produced a series of organ works which he himself never surpassed in their union of technical mastery and inspirational depth. Among them are the Passacaglia in C minor, now widely known through various transcriptions for orchestra; the Prelude and Fugue in A minor, one of Franz Liszt's most successful piano transcriptions; the Fantasia and Fugue in G minor, probably Bach's most celebrated organ work; and the Dorian Toccata and Fugue in D minor.

The Passacaglia is an old form which derived, somewhere in the dimmed-out past, from a Spanish dance. It is one of the theme-and-variation species, in which a short tune in the bass is repeated over and over again, while the variation material is reared above it. The form is a twin brother to the chaconne, and the lack of a clear distinction between the two has almost turned the wits of modern programme annotators. Bach went for a model for his Passacaglia to Buxtehude, who had written a number of works in the form. Bach's eight-measure theme—simple, slow-moving and gravely expressive—is first stated alone, softly, in the low pedals, seeming to rise from the very earth. Around it Bach constructs twenty variations, with the theme itself generally in the bass but sometimes in the treble or the middle voices. The music seems to grow, to

rise, to expand in all directions; until at the end of the twentieth variation, propelled by a mighty climax, it bursts into a double fugue. Here the first four measures of the theme are joined by a new subject and developed at length. Again there is the feeling of enormous expansion, of a gradual irresistible movement towards some far-off goal. Leopold Stokowski, who made one of the most successful orchestral transcriptions of this work, wrote that "Bach's Passacaglia is in music what a great Gothic cathedral is in architecture—the same vast conception—the same soaring mysticism given eternal form. . . . It is one of the most divinely inspired contrapuntal works ever conceived."

The Fantasia and Fugue in G minor synthesizes many of the ripest elements of Bach's art in organ composition. It also illustrates the extent to which he summed up, expanded, and perfected polyphonic music itself and the entire baroque style. His Fantasia is the last word in a form which had long been a favourite with the North German organists. It is baroque to the core—a rambling, rhapsodically conceived structure, marked with heavy chordal masses, pedal points and slow-moving step passages in the bass, ornamented above with recitative-like arabesques. Two features of this great essay especially impress the listener today—the modernity of its dramatic style and its harmonic daring. The Toccata and Fugue in D minor had indicated Bach's sense of the dramatic in music, of building climaxes of power and impact. This was a skill in which he far surpassed any of his predecessors, and which was lost to music after his death until it reappeared with Beethoven. It was an intuitive skill, one which sprang from his passionate and intense nature. So much of Bach's music is the ideal of classic rectitude that this side of his art dawned only slowly upon the modern public, but it is one of the surest clues to the soul of the artist and the vision that impelled his great utterance.

The harmonic scheme of the G minor Fantasia must have shocked many a listener of Bach's time. His bold use of suspensions, of dissonance, of modulations that suggest the freedom of modern chromaticism, are not found in such profusion in any music before his own. This is another side of Bach's art which the passage of time has revealed. He was not alone the classic model of diatonic procedure; again and again in his greater works he threw out harmonic ideas of remarkable daring. The composers of the later eighteenth century did not know his music well enough to be influenced by these ideas. If they had, the science of harmony would not have stood practically still for half a century after his death. Until we come to Schubert there is no composer who had Bach's harmonic enterprise; for his sense of the drama that is latent in harmony we must wait for Wagner.

The G minor Fantasia is followed by one of Bach's most celebrated fugues. The fugue as a form is indissolubly linked with Bach's name because of his peculiar and unrivalled mastery of it. He did not, of course, invent the fugue. It was an old and even hackneyed form and an especial favourite with the German organists who provided him with his early models. It is another typical baroque framework, an arbitrary and highly artificial set of rules for the development of an elaborate movement from a single basic theme. It makes special demands on both the composer and the listener. The composer faces the problem of manipulating these complicated rules and of creating from them a genuine art work, instead of an abstruse intellectual exercise. The listener has to be sufficiently aware of (and in sympathy with) the composer's purely mechanical problems to be able to appreciate the aesthetic triumph of their ultimate solution.



The appreciation of fugal music suffers today from the fact that it is the product of a vanished age of polyphony. Moreover, many musicians, including some of the most eminent, do not know how to perform it. They do not understand that coexisting with design in this music is texture, which must be clarified and differentiated with the utmost care; and that it must be animated by a rhythm which impels every instant of its life. Too often the performances of Bach's fugues are caricatured into a jumbled mass of sound which the public is right to reject. By contrast, there are few more satisfying aesthetic experiences than a performance of these same works by competent hands.

It is surprising how many composers have misunderstood and misapplied the fugue. Some of the greatest have tried their hand at it and failed. Mozart wrote some glorious fugal movements, and Beethoven had a lesser number of successes; but Bach's mastery was unique. He too wrote dull fugues and unsuccessful ones, especially in his pre-Weimar days; but only he wrote a large number of fine ones. Only he gained such a mastery of their intricacies that he was able to manipulate them to suit his very moods. There are Bach fugues which are gay and sparkling, irresistible as dance tunes; others are sombre, deliberate, filled with pathos and heartbreak. Some are frankly showpieces to emphasise the performer's skill; others are exalted proclamations of man's noblest thoughts.

The various Weimar fugues illustrate Bach's growing mastery over mood and technique. The G minor Fugue is a triumph of sheer mechanical and melodic splendour. Its flawless form recalls the beauty of pure mathematics; its spontaneous movement is like the grace of some exquisitely made machine. Wholly contrasting in mood is the Dorian Fugue in D minor, a work suffused with melancholy, dignified, devoid of display. Harvey Grace, foremost of the English writers on Bach's organ music, points out the basic difference between Bach's procedure with the fugue and that of his predecessors. Even able composers like Buxtehude were seldom careful enough with the theme itself; they ran to repeated notes and zigzag intervals which would impress themselves on the mind of the listener chiefly because of their eccentricity. Bach soon learned that a fugue could never rise above its theme, and thereafter he moulded and perfected his basic tunes with extreme care. That was one of the secrets of his command of mood in his fugues, of his ability to rear a structure like the Dorian Fugue in which the mechanics of the form are made to serve an emotion of the most poignant sort.

## V

Some time in the year 1717 Bach had a quarrel with Duke Wilhelm Ernst and decided to leave Weimar. The exact nature of the dispute is not known, but Bach may have been irked because the post of Kapellmeister in the Duke's orchestra was not offered to him when it became vacant the year before. It may have been an honour that he strongly desired, for when he resigned from the Duke's service he announced his intention of becoming Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. There is also a possibility that the composer left Weimar to better himself financially. At Cöthen he was offered a salary of about £60 a year, which was almost four times the amount for which he began at Weimar. This must have been an important consideration, since Bach now had four children whose care and education meant a continually growing expense.

Whatever the cause, the results of the resignation from Weimar were startling. The Duke put Bach under arrest and detained him at his palace. If more were known of this episode interesting light might be thrown upon the composer's personal life at Weimar. What seems to be indicated is a clash of temperament. Bach was a very stubborn man. Again and again in the course of his career he ran into trouble by his refusal to budge when he thought his rights were being infringed upon. In this case his obstinacy and independence seem to have angered the Duke, for he was detained a whole month before he was permitted to go. Fortunately, this period of his disgrace was turned to good purpose. The composer occupied his time by compiling his "*Orgelbüchlein*" ["*Little Organ Book*"], a collection of chorale preludes.

The chorale prelude was a form which Bach seemed to love above all others, for he turned to it again and again in the course of his long career—from the time when he was a mere boy at Lüneburg first trying his hand at composition, to the last days of his life at Leipzig. It was an old form, and one which Bach made singularly his own; not because it gave him (like the fugue) a vehicle for his technical skill, but rather because it provided an outlet for his deeply emotional, poetic, and religious nature.

The chorale prelude was an integral part of the Lutheran Church ritual. At a certain point in the service, just before the congregation was to sing the particular hymn of the day, the organist would deliver a short musical interlude to lead up to the old song. To avoid the monotony of simply playing a verse of the hymn itself as an introduction, the practice grew for the organist to "preludize"; that is, to compose or improvise a short piece based on the hymn, but adorned with elaborate polyphony so that the tune itself was not too obviously exposed. Naturally Bach would excel at a form such as this, but there was another aspect of the chorale prelude which attracted him powerfully. This was the opportunity which it afforded him to paint in music the ideas expressed by the hymn's words. Bach's whole nature—his deep-rooted faith in his religion, his humanity and tenderness, his love of the poetic and the dramatic—every spiritual part of him responded to the sentiments of these beautiful old sacred songs.

Despite the importance of these chorale preludes in the general scheme of Bach's art and the clues they revealed to his procedures, they were for years the most neglected and the least understood of all his works. It so happened that in the nineteenth century, when Bach's music began to be exhumed, the choral preludes which were still in existence were published at first without the words to the hymns. The hymn tunes themselves had in some cases been forgotten, or were often so deeply embedded in Bach's variation material that they could not be traced. Thus these pieces were often so many enigmas, mere mathematical exercises whose true point and purpose remained a mystery.

It was only after modern musicologists had unearthed and studied the words of the hymn tunes that these chorale preludes came into their own. It was then that scholars like Schweitzer were able to discover that these pieces were the very antithesis of what Bach was so long believed to stand for—the purely formal, the impersonal, and the abstract. Instead they are pictorial and descriptive to a remarkable degree, and they throw a revealing light upon Bach's methods of composition and his whole aesthetic approach to music.

In these pieces Bach paints scenes, portrays emotions and moods, depicts the most elusive shades of meaning that are expressed by the words, actually anticipating the idea behind the modern song style of Schubert, Schumann,

Mussorgsky, and Wolf. For this purpose Bach gradually evolved an extensive set of musical symbols—small expressive figures and themes which became his means of expressing such ideas as grief, gladness, adoration, sighing, weeping, etc. "Some are directional," writes Professor Terry, "denoting ascent or descent, height or depth, width, distance, and so forth. The act of hastening or running, and, conversely, the idea of rest or fatigue, are indicated by appropriate symbolic formulas. The moods, again, are distinguished by themes diatonic or chromatic to express joy or sorrow. The thought of laughter, of tumult, of terror, and the forces of nature, the winds, waves, clouds, and thunder have their indicative symbols, which do not vary. Bach was one of the tenderest and most emotional of men, with the eye of a painter and the soul of a poet. But the fact is only fully revealed to those who take pains to translate him."

There are close to one hundred and fifty chorale preludes by Bach in existence. During his lifetime he made several collections, of which the "Little Organ Book" containing forty-six was the first. This group of pieces was described by Bach himself as a collection "wherein the Beginner may learn to perform Chorals of every kind and also acquire Skill in the Use of the Pedal"—in short, they were intended as a means of instruction. Nevertheless, that purpose actually turns out to be secondary. They have a special quality of intimacy and confidence, as if the composer were opening both his soul and the inmost treasures of his art to the aspiring young student of the organ, or to anyone else who would listen to his message with sympathy and understanding. They encompass an astonishing range of emotional intensity and of mood, with a measure of personal expressiveness unsuspected of the composer who wrote the fugal abstractions, the preludes, toccatas, and fantasias for the same instrument. Today the various pieces in this collection are the property of every organ student, and many of them are achieving fame through transcriptions for orchestra or piano.

Of the chorale preludes in general Ernest Newman wrote with justification that "they are the key to the very heart of Bach", and that "if everything else of his were lost, from them we could reconstruct him in all his pathos and almost all his grandeur".

## VI

Bach's departure from Weimar occurred late in 1717. He had been there nine years, a period of astonishing artistic growth and productivity. Now he was entering upon a new career, one which would require musical composition of a wholly different order. At Weimar, as organist and choirmaster, his works were almost entirely concerned with the organ and the church service; at Cöthen he was the leader of the Prince's small orchestra of eighteen players, and as such would be required to produce quantities of chamber music. Moreover, the church at Cöthen was Reformed, which meant that the staunchly Lutheran Bach was completely cut off from all the church music which he loved so well and which had been his life study. The Reformed Churches of Germany were members of the Calvinist branch of Protestantism, abhorring music as part and parcel of the Roman ritualism.

The real mystery of Bach's move to Cöthen is his relinquishing of his career as virtuoso organist. In the new post he had no adequate organ at his disposal, only a tiny instrument in the grim little Calvinist chapel which was no organ

at all for a player of Bach's calibre. This meant that he deliberately gave up his organ career, even though at the time he was famous all over Germany as a virtuoso of the first rank.

It seems fairly evident that Bach did not care about exploiting his virtuosity and had very little desire for fame. His extreme modesty is clearly inferred in the lack of personal information about him, especially the lack of personal letters or descriptions of his family life, his home, and his friends. Bach was entirely unlike his great contemporary Handel, whose personality was emblazoned over an entire age in the history of England, and whose name appeared constantly in the press and the private correspondence of other famous people. Bach as a person impinged hardly at all upon the public consciousness of his time.

During his five years at Cöthen the composer's output was almost exclusively instrumental—a flood of music which included the Brandenburg Concertos, a group of orchestral suites, the violin and clavier concertos, sonatas for various instruments, and a large collection of works for the keyboard, including the English and French Suites, the Little Preludes and Inventions, the Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue, and Part I of "The Well-Tempered Clavier". These works contain some of the most magnificent music in existence; many of them are sovereign examples of their particular type. Yet most of them were composed as part of Bach's job, which was to provide musical entertainment for the Prince. Practically all of Bach's vast output falls in this same category, i.e. its basic purpose was utilitarian. It was created as part of the artist's job in life, his means of staying alive. It was not conceived primarily as a "work of art", detached from the business of life. That type of music is a modern conception, and the production of it on a large scale begins with Beethoven.

The apparent ease with which Bach turned from religious to secular music for totally different instruments indicates his method of work. Only an artist who enjoyed an easy balance between his inspiration and his technical resources could have operated as Bach did. He was the opposite of the artist whose nervous system is raked by the effort of creation, whose work echoes the birth-pangs of his creative ideas, and whose life and temperament and personality are coloured and warped and made eccentric by the agony of the inner struggle. With Bach, composition was an intellectual struggle, not a nervous one. Geared to his musical talent were a stupendous technical equipment and a boundless imagination. Thus gifted, he had no need for soul-shattering effort. To him composition, though difficult, must have been as normal a process as breathing.

Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen was an agreeable and sympathetic patron. He was only twenty-four years old when Bach entered his service; but he had travelled extensively, was well educated, had cultivated tastes in the arts, and was passionately fond of music. His affection for Bach and his respect for the composer's art seem to have been marked. He paid a liberal salary, and several times he asked Bach to accompany him on his travels. He also stood as god-father to the composer's seventh child, a condescension not frequently encountered among eighteenth-century princes.

Two of the journeys were important events in Bach's life. These were trips to Carlsbad, where the Prince went to take the waters. It was the custom of the time for wealthy noblemen (imitating, of course, the Court of Versailles) to take with them on their travels the more gifted artists or musicians attached to their courts, as an indication of their own tastes and predilections. Prince Leopold was accompanied by Bach and a quintet of string players from his

orchestra. He also brought along a harpsichord, with several servants to look after it.

The first journey was made in 1718, the second in 1720. On one of these occasions Bach was fortunate in meeting a famous Prussian prince—Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, the youngest son of the Great Elector. The Margrave was a man of extravagant tastes happily combined with great wealth. He loved music, and it was his pleasure to collect for his library manuscripts of concertos by the noted composers of that day. He probably heard Bach perform at one of Prince Ludwig's musical soirees, for he gave the composer a commission. The result was six concertos, now known as the Brandenburg Concertos, which Bach completed in 1721 and sent to the Margrave in Berlin. The composer included an elaborate dedication in French, believed to have been written for him by someone at the Cöthen Court. Its obsequiousness, though the custom of the time, is repellent to modern readers. Bach had to grovel, to speak of the Margrave's "condescending interest in the insignificant musical talents with which heaven has gifted me", and to beg His Highness not to judge the Concertos "by the standards of your own refined and delicate taste, but to seek in them rather the expression of my profound respect and obedience".

The fate of the Brandenburg Concertos after they were received in Berlin is important, because it indicates how Bach's music was regarded during his lifetime. The Margrave could not have remotely guessed that these six pieces were to be the avenue to immortality for himself and his whole proud line. It appears that they were never performed for him at all. He did not even have them included in the catalogue of his library, which recorded the names of numerous other contemporary composers. After his death in 1734 the Margrave's library was sold. Various concertos by composers then famous but now dead beyond all hope of resurrection were carefully identified, but Bach's manuscripts were disposed of unnamed, in a job lot, and at a price so low as to indicate that they were practically worthless. They might have been lost for ever had they not happened to come into the possession of one of Bach's pupils—J. P. Kirnberger, a noted composer, conductor, and theorist. This man in turn passed them on to one of his own pupils, Princess Amalie, a sister of Frederick the Great. From her they went to the Royal Library in Berlin.

"The eighteenth-century concerto," writes Lawrence Gilman, "was a very different bird from the thing known to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the same name—which is essentially . . . a showpiece for a soloist, with more or less unwelcome interruptions by the orchestra". In Bach's time a concerto was generally written for a small group of solo instruments, called the *concertino*. This was backed by a large group of instruments, called the *tutti*, consisting of strings alone or sometimes strings and wind instruments. The conductor, sitting at a harpsichord, helped to fill out the harmonies of the tutti group. The essential characteristic of concerto music was therefore the use of beautiful and effective contrasts between these two instrumental groups—between the delicate solo playing of the small concertino and the bold, sweeping declamations of the large tutti.

The concerto form was of Italian origin, a product of the magnificent age of string-playing which developed in that country in the years of the late baroque. At the same time that Bach's immediate forerunners in North Germany were exploring and developing the organ, the Italians were concentrating on the various instruments of the viol family—especially the violin. The precise place in history of the master of all violin makers, Antonio Stradivari (1650?–1737),

is a milestone which marks both the production of the finest instruments of their kind and a school of violin virtuosi who played them. For these and their kindred instruments a splendid new musical literature gradually evolved; forms like the sonata, the trio sonata, and the concerto began to take shape.

The peculiar form of the concerto has caused historians to believe that it grew up in the homes of the nobility who, like Bach's employers, were wealthy enough to maintain private orchestras. A few expert players performed the more difficult parts of the concertino. The larger group of players in the *tutti* had much less difficult music to perform, because they were largely made up of servants who regularly performed menial duties in the house and could double with fair skill on some instrument.

Among the Italian composers of the late baroque, Torelli (1660–1708) and Corelli (1653–1713) were the first to weld the concerto into an established form; but it was Vivaldi (1675–1743) to whom Bach went for his immediate models. Of all the foreign music that Bach studied during his lifetime none seems to have influenced him more or caused him more pleasure than that of his Italian contemporary. While he was still at Weimar, Bach had become acquainted with Vivaldi's concertos. He transcribed at least two of them for organ, and later in his life he transformed a number of others for harpsichord. These works were clearly in his mind when he started on the Brandenburg Concertos, his first original works in instrumental music on what might be called a symphonic scale.

In general, Bach took from Vivaldi the three-movement form of the concerto, which included a brilliant, bustling first movement, a more lyrical slow movement, and a rushing finale. In details of workmanship Bach far surpassed his Italian models. He manipulated his instrumental groups with boldness and variety. He grouped them, contrasted them, featured them, all in a manner brilliantly effective and largely untried before his time. He also made exorbitant demands upon the players. The hacks or the servants of his day could hardly have attempted these concertos, which can be played even today only by experts. The polyphonic writing in these works ranks among the best that Bach himself ever accomplished. Stringed instruments are eminently suited to the linear weaving of melodic lines, and Bach took every advantage of his opportunity. The interplay of various voices on contrasting tonal planes is masterly. His slow movements, too, are far beyond those of his predecessors, in depth of feeling and the poetic richness of his ideas.

Every one of the Brandenburg Concertos calls for a different combination of instruments, as if the composer meant deliberately to show his patron what he could do with various groupings. While a few of the instruments which Bach used are now obsolete, and others have changed so that for modern performances certain adjustments have to be made, the works as a whole are far from museum pieces. Several of them are fixtures in the repertoire of every symphony orchestra. Apart from their intrinsic beauty they are interesting as the nearest approach that Bach made towards music for the modern symphonic orchestra.

Bach wrote no other concertos in the Brandenburg style, possibly because the happy occasion of a commission never again offered itself. He did, however, write a number of works for solo instruments and strings, and they happen to present a particularly uncomfortable bed of thorns for musicologists. Of these concertos three are for solo violin, including the famous double concerto in D minor for two violins—a work beloved by generations of virtuosi. Then there are eight concertos for solo clavier, three for two claviers, two for three claviers, and one for four claviers—all of course with strings accompanying.

But two of the clavier concertos are *duplicates* of the violin concertos; another is identical with the Brandenburg Concerto No. 4; one of the concertos for two clavers is identical with the double concerto for two violins, and the concerto for four clavers is actually a transcription of a concerto for four violins by Vivaldi. Moreover, another of the concertos for two clavers is believed to be identical with a lost concerto for violin and oboe; while some modern Bach scholars believe that several other of the clavier concertos are also identical with other lost violin concertos.

The conclusions to be drawn from this knotty puzzle are more obvious than the solution of the puzzle itself. It is clear that Bach, an incorrigible transcriber both of his own and other men's music, did not consider his own works inviolate, or irrevocably cast in the particular medium in which he first put them. Throughout his life he did not hesitate, when the press of work or lack of time demanded, to take an old score and put it into a new form, "achieving the most astonishing translations from one medium to another, transcribing concerto movements into great choruses, and, conversely, turning arias into slow movements of concertos". This point needs to be stressed at the present time, when the spread of public interest in Bach's music has produced an enormous number of transcriptions for all sorts of modern instruments and combinations—from the symphonic orchestra to the harmonica. For some musicians transcriptions by anyone other than the composer himself are damned *per se*, on the ground that the composer alone is aware of the proper medium for his ideas. Certain modern Bach transcriptions have come in for the severest criticisms of all, when as a matter of fact if any music actually lends itself to transcription it is Bach's. He composed at a time when highly specialized music-writing fitted for specific instruments was only beginning to be realized. Schweitzer remarked: "At bottom he conceived everything for an ideal instrument: one that had all the possibilities of polyphonic playing possessed by the keyed instruments, and all of the bowed instruments' capacities for phrasing. This is how he came to write polyphonically for even a single instrument of the string family."

It would seem that the only criterion to be applied to a transcription of Bach's or any other music is whether or not it possesses interest and beauty in its new medium, regardless of what the composer might have thought of that medium. Each transcription must be judged separately, and on its own merits as a piece of music. In Bach's case the purists' stand against transcriptions is particularly shaky, not only because of the composer's own practices but because most of the instruments for which he actually did write are completely changed today. He would be astounded by our vast modern organs; our pianos are totally different instruments from his own clavers, and even the violin has changed, since in Bach's time it was still played with a loose bow and a flat bridge which permitted the sounding of unbroken chords and even polyphony. It is one of the glories of Bach's music that it has kept pace with the development of modern instruments; and that no matter how intricate or how vast some of them have become, or how different in tone colour from what he might have been able to conceive, they are still far from outgrowing the possible range of his art.

## VII

On his return from the second Carlsbad journey in 1720, Bach had a shocking experience. He came home to find that his wife had died during his absence

and was already buried. According to one version of the story he had actually entered his own house before his tragic loss was made known to him. His life during the next year must have been a very sad one, with four motherless children, one of them only five years old. It was during this time that the composer worked at the Brandenburg Concertos, and at the compilation of another and even more famous masterpiece—Part I of “The Well-Tempered Clavier”.

The title, “The Well-Tempered Clavier”, was chosen by Bach with special intent. It proclaimed his championship of a new theory which was agitating the musicians of his day, and which concerned the method of tuning keyed instruments. The old method of tuning (the “mean tone” or “unequal temperament” method) was based on a theoretical acoustical correctness. Its difference from the new “equal temperament” can be indicated most simply on any modern piano. In our present keyed instruments, tones like C sharp and D flat are identical. According to acoustical fact, however, they are two entirely different tones, the C sharp being slightly higher in pitch than the D flat. The old method of tuning recognized this strict scientific fact, to the extent that on the old keyed instruments the key of C major was tuned “true”, and the other tones forced to conform to it. This meant that the player could perform only in a few keys closely related to C major. The more remote keys would sound badly out of tune. A composer could not modulate freely from one key to another, but had to content himself in any given composition to a few preferred keys. If an instrument were built which would provide all the various keys, each with its scientifically correct scale, a fingerboard with fifty-three digitals to the octave would be required.

It is true that the old tuning produced a depth of sonority which musicians were loath to lose; nevertheless it began to be recognized that clinging to it was stultifying a new and growing keyboard art. The champions of equal temperament proposed a system of tuning in which the slight differences in pitch between such tones as C sharp and D flat would be disregarded. Instead these tones would be combined into single notes. Thus the keyboard could be divided into twelve equal half steps to the octave, and the scale of every key, instead of just a few, would then be approximately in tune. The “acoustical falsehood” thus created was well-nigh imperceptible, but the resulting convenience and freedom gained for the composer and the performer were incalculable.

Equal temperament was thus a compromise, a practical solution to a difficult physical problem. It is noteworthy that Bach, with his interest in harmonic freedom, saw the value of the new system and became one of its strongest proponents. “The Well-Tempered [i.e. equal-tempered] Clavier”, with its prelude and fugue in each of the twenty-four keys, major and minor, all capable of being performed on the same keyboard, *provided the instrument were tuned in equal temperament*, was an irrefutable argument in favour of the new method.

As for the precise instrument for which these pieces were intended, it is probable that Bach meant them for any of the keyed instruments; but it is certain that he himself preferred to play them upon the clavichord. This instrument is not to be confused with the clavicembalo (or harpsichord) which was large enough to resemble the modern wing-shaped grand piano, and which often had two manuals with a set of pedals controlling its tone quality. The clavichord had no pedals, but was merely a small box about five octaves long, which could be placed upon a small table and was light enough to be easily carried. Its tone was so delicate that it could be heard only a few feet from the instrument, but under the fingers of a master like Bach it was capable of



producing sounds of exquisite quality and gradation. It was said to possess a soul and the ability to "reflect every shade of the player's feelings as a faithful mirror", or to "quiver just like a voice swayed by emotion". Bach loved the clavichord, preferring it to the clavicembalo, whose tone he thought coarse and unsympathetic. In this collection of preludes and fugues he very likely exhausted the possibilities of the smaller instrument.

Apart from the controversial purpose of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" the collection was also intended for the instruction of Bach's children and his pupils. This pedagogical phase had a curious effect upon the fortunes of the great work. At first it helped to keep the music alive. During the century or so after the composer's death when the rest of his music lay in oblivion, "The Well-Tempered Clavier" was known and used by many German piano teachers. Even well into the present century, however, it was still studied and played only in private, and generally for its instructional purpose. Thus the great emotional and aesthetic basis of these pieces was largely ignored.

Except for his organ works, "The Well-Tempered Clavier" affords the best instrumental access to Bach's art. In these short pieces are synthesized his command of polyphony, of melodic and rhythmic invention, his perfectly knit style, even something of the noble span of his emotional range. Some of the preludes are little masterpieces of baroque scrollwork, purling arabesques in which the fingers must run and leap at breathless speed; others, e.g. the C sharp minor and the B minor, are examples of the purest polyphony, the joining of several lines of melody into one superbly proportioned whole. The opening Prelude in C major is of a baffling and mystic serenity; the preludes in F major and G major are gay and exuberant; still others are suffused with melancholy, while the E flat minor is an elegy in tone and one of the most sorrowful works in music.

For his fugues in this collection, Bach scaled down the form to miniature size without damage to its essential beauty and effectiveness. These pieces range from the little two-voiced example in E minor, in which two strands of melody go chasing and dodging each other up and down the keyboard at lightning speed, to the lordly B flat minor in five voices—a slow-moving and closely woven essay of great majesty and depth of feeling. Certain fugues, like that in G major, radiate health and high spirits; others like the F sharp minor are poignantly expressive, the mechanical outlines of the fugue form being lost in the shadows of a deep despondency. The G minor Fugue, only thirty-four measures long, is a masterpiece of concision; while the last in B minor is an extended movement that resembles some of the composer's lengthy works for the organ.

Today the preludes and fugues of "The Well-Tempered Clavier" are more than a part of every pianist's technical background. They have entered the concert repertoire, where they belong. More than two centuries have passed since Bach composed them, and in that time the instrument for which they were intended has passed through a metamorphosis so profound that Bach himself would doubtless be amazed at the sound of his pieces on a modern grand piano. In time to come the piano too may change and develop even more radically; but it does not seem likely that "The Well-Tempered Clavier" itself will become obsolete. While there are keyboard instruments in the world it is likely to remain a living source of beauty.

In 1721, the year after the death of Maria Barbara, Bach married again. His second wife was Anna Magdalena Wülcken, the daughter of a Court trumpeter. She was only twenty-one years old at the time of their marriage and Bach was

thirty-six. The personality of Maria Barbara has been utterly lost in the shrouding silences of history, but something is known indirectly of Anna Magdalena. All evidence points to the fact that her union with Bach was an unusually happy one. Between 1723 and 1742 she bore the composer thirteen children. She was very musical, having been a Court singer at Cöthen before her marriage. She was also able to play the clavier, and Bach took obvious pleasure in encouraging her musical talents. He wrote two collections of little pieces for her instruction, one of which is called "The Little Clavier Book of Anna Magdalena Bach".

Anna Magdalena helped Bach greatly by relieving him of much of the drudgery of copying music. Many of his cantatas are in her hand, as are works of other composers which he wanted to study. She once copied out a large part of a Passion by Handel. In spite of the paucity of the evidence relating to her, Anna Magdalena passes into history as one of those wives of great men who were helpmates in every sense; she was her husband's devoted companion and assistant, and the source of inspiration for some of his most charmingly intimate works.

Among the music which seems to have been composed for Anna Magdalena was a group of little clavier pieces known as the French Suites. The name became attached to them probably because Bach was imitating the French style of writing of that period, a style made popular by Marchand and Couperin. The French composers made their suites out of short pieces which were based on dances—the gavotte, the minuet, the *passepied*, the *bourrée*, the *gigue*, etc. The differences in tempo, rhythm, and mood of these dances gave the composer an opportunity to create a sheaf of pieces of considerable variety.

Bach wrote a large number of suites for clavier. There are six of the French Suites, and six so-called English Suites (the reason for this name is not known), all of which were written at Cöthen. Years later at Leipzig he completed six more kindred works which were titled *partitas*. Professor Láng writes, "It is a sheer wonder to see the grave Lutheran cantor, the epitome of German baroque massiveness, clad in the impeccable silk stockings, lace-trimmed jacket and powdered wig of the French rococo, and moving about in this circle with the assuredness of the very masters whose style he attempted to imitate."

Bach's suites are all in six or seven short movements, each beginning with an *allemande* or prelude and ending always with a *gigue*. No more graceful or charming pieces are to be found in German music. Bach's workmanship is like that of a fine line drawing or an etching, for many of the movements are in two-voiced counterpoint—the two delicate lines of melody without any other support whatever performing the entire function of providing melodic interest, harmonic structure, and rhythmic animation.

Not all of these pieces are imitations of French elegance. Bach could not resist intensifying and broadening every musical form that he touched. Certain of the *sarabandes* become not merely stately dances but poignant slow movements, and there are some fugal movements of considerable length and complexity. This is even more marked in the later groups of *partitas*, some of which begin with elaborate and majestic overtures, and often depart far in mood and texture from the rococo. The sixth and last *partita*, in E minor, has burst the boundaries of the simple little French forms to become an extended work, serious in mood and spacious in design. Here is the later eighteenth-century sonata in embryo.

## VIII

Shortly after his second marriage a rift began to appear in the placid relations of Bach and his patron. The Prince also married, and his bride caused a decided change in the order of things at Cothen. She was a light-minded and flighty young person, described as caring only for "balls and fireworks". Her appreciation of music was adolescent. In the playing of her husband's Kapelle, and particularly in the weighty music of its director, she had no interest whatever. Bach termed her an "*amusa*" and, realizing that the Prince's interests were diverted from his music, he began to look about for another post. For a long time the urge seems to have been strong in him to get back into church music, to a post which would put a choir and an organ once again at his disposal. In 1723 he got what he wanted.

In Leipzig there was a famous school for boys, St. Thomas's, a venerable institution that had been founded in the thirteenth century. Bach heard that the cantorship was vacant, so he applied for the post. The duties of the cantor included teaching singing and Latin to some fifty boys between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, and acting as music director of the two churches with which the school was connected—St. Thomas's and St. Nicholas's. It was the latter phase of the cantor's duties which attracted Bach, for it meant that he had to provide an elaborate programme of music in one of the two churches every Sunday and on certain feast days.

Early in 1723, Bach underwent the trials for the appointment, and on Good Friday of that year he conducted his hastily composed "St. John Passion" in St. Thomas's Church, as proof of his ability. A few months later he was formally appointed. The leave-taking from Cöthen was under unforeseen and tragic circumstances. Nine days before Bach and his family departed the *amusa* died. Two years later the Prince married again; but in 1728, five years after Bach left his service, he too was dead. Bach's affection for the young nobleman who had treated him so kindly is shown by his journey to Cöthen to attend the Prince's funeral and to provide music for the memorial service.

The Leipzig post was Bach's last. He remained there for twenty-seven years until his death in 1750. He went to Leipzig in his thirty-eighth year, an artist with almost two decades of very great accomplishment behind him. All this, however, was in reality only the prelude to what was to come. The music of the Leipzig period is difficult to appraise, because in physical bulk alone it is gigantic. Bach was a busy man much of the time, occupied with the routine tasks of his cantorship; yet during these years he composed the "St. Matthew Passion" and the colossal Mass in B minor, which are his greatest works; the Magnificat, six motets, a series of organ pieces that crown his entire accomplishment for that instrument, more superlative works for the clavier, and a vast series of church cantatas. Not only is this music enormous in physical bulk, but some of it is on a scale of architectonic design that is mountainous, and inspired beyond any music composed before its time or since.

Viewing these accomplishments, it is hard to believe that the cantorship of St. Thomas's was a sorry disappointment to the composer. The existing record of his office is a long recital of misunderstanding and petty bickering, quarrels with associates who tried to cheat him out of his perquisites, with church authori-

ties who treated him like a hack, and with narrow-minded rectors who had no sympathy with his music and no realization of his stature as an artist. When Bach went there in 1723 he found that the school was badly run down, in the hands of an old rector who was tottering and senile. The boys were an undisciplined gang of young ruffians, morally weakened by having to beg in the streets of Leipzig for donations to the school, and often ill and miserable from undernourishment and neglect. Their musical education was poor and their voices were wretched. Moreover, the older singers and instrumentalists who were hired from the town to fill out the choir and the orchestra were also inadequate. When Bach complained about these conditions he only got himself on bad terms with the rector and the town council.

With the death of the old rector in 1729 a new one named Gesner was appointed, and for the next five years improvement and order reigned at St. Thomas's. Gesner was young, a good organizer and a scholar, and his regard for Bach's music and attainments was marked. But Gesner was followed in 1734 by one Johann August Ernesti, a hard-headed bigot who became one of Bach's worst persecutors. He hated music, disparaged its importance even in front of the boys, and did his best to humiliate the cantor. Bach was something of a match for him. Always proud when his dignity was affronted, and pugnacious when the rights of his office were at stake, the composer stood by his guns to the bitter end. One of his worst encounters with Ernesti would be essentially comic if it did not involve the personal feelings of one of the world's greatest geniuses. It began when the boys of the choir, unruly because Bach was a poor disciplinarian, behaved in a scandalous manner during a wedding. This led to a quarrel between Bach and Ernesti over the right to appoint a prefect. The battle lasted for two years, during which time both cantor and rector bombarded the council with petitions, charges, and countercharges. It did not end until Bach at last petitioned the King of Saxony. His Majesty resolved the matter by a compromise.

Bach and his family lived in one of the wings of the school building itself. When they first came to St. Thomas's the ancient structure was overcrowded and badly in need of repair. It housed the family of the rector, the schoolrooms and dormitories of the boys, and the family of the cantor. The crowded and unsanitary conditions are blamed by Professor Terry for the depressing record of mortality among Bach's children during his early years in Leipzig. Of the first eight children born to Anna Magdalena only two survived, one of whom was an imbecile. The other six children died at ages ranging from one day to five years. After Bach had been there eight years the building was enlarged and renovated. Of the five Bach children born thereafter four were healthy and survived their father many years. Among them was Johann Christina (1735-1782), one of the most illustrious of the sons. Through his successes as a composer in London he became known as the "English" Bach.

In the gloomy, congested quarters of the cantor one room was reserved for his study. It was small and narrow, lighted by a single window. A thin whitewashed partition separated it from one of the classrooms, and from it could be heard the sound of a nearby millwheel. This was Bach's workroom for many years.

The composer's regular salary at St. Thomas's was small, but it was increased by special fees which he earned at funerals and weddings, so that his income amounted to about £100 a year. To this were added allowances

for corn, firewood, and wine. Bach once remarked that in certain years his income from funerals was a disappointment, because the air of the town of Leipzig was good and therefore deaths were fewer.

The most important of Bach's duties as cantor was the composition of music for the church services. Anyone wishing to trace reasons for the slow decline of Protestantism since the eighteenth century might do well to examine the regular Sunday service which took place in St. Thomas's and St. Nicholas's during Bach's tenure. It was a mixture of worship, preaching, and music of appalling length. It began at seven in the morning and lasted until nearly noon. The discomforts to the congregation resulting from such a stupefying ritual can only be imagined. Some slight relief was afforded the boys in the choir: if the church got so cold that they could no longer endure it, they were marched back to the school to listen to a sermon. The only respite for adult worshippers occurred about midway in the eighteen-part service, when (on alternate Sundays) the choir would perform a cantata, accompanied by organ and orchestra. The cantata was an elaborate collection of solos, recitatives, duets, and choruses, with occasional orchestral interludes. It lasted about half an hour.

The cantata as a musical form occupied Bach's attention over a space of forty years. He wrote his first in 1704 when he was the boy organist at Arnstadt, and his last in Leipzig in 1744. The sum total is two hundred and ninety-five cantatas, but the great majority belong to the Leipzig period. There, in the space of about twenty years, he composed about two hundred and sixty-five cantatas, an average of one a month. About two thirds of these works are extant. It is true that there were other cantors of his time who were even more prolific than Bach in the production of these works, but his achievement remains monumental. What in other hands was simply a routine and hack production, he maintained at the level of great art.

The cantata was in reality a sacred concert which had gradually grown up in the Lutheran service. It was customary for the cantata to be linked with the particular Gospel of the day; in fact it was a kind of musical exposition of the Gospel text. For the words of some of his early cantatas at Weimar Bach went directly to the Bible, piecing together various verses to suit his purpose. Thereafter he began using librettos which had been prepared by various religious writers and which were in common use throughout Germany. These librettos provided the composer with a ready-made framework for his music. There were rhymed stanzas, portions of blank verse, excerpts taken directly from the Bible text, and generally as a conclusion a stanza from one of the old Lutheran hymns—all bearing directly on the day's Gospel.

Bach's treatment of the words of his cantatas was identical with his procedure in his organ chorale preludes. He sought always to make his music express as vividly as possible the ideas conveyed by the words. He painted pictures, imitated sounds, portrayed emotions, often with complete realism. The musical symbols that he used were the same as those he evolved for the chorale preludes, a tonal language that anticipated the speech of many of the nineteenth-century song composers.

In a number of his last cantatas Bach dispensed with librettos entirely and evolved the so-called "chorale cantatas". Just as the organ chorale preludes are a polyphonic expansion of the simple old hymns, so the chorale cantatas are an even more elaborate and extended glorification of these same sacred songs. Using both the words and music of some chorale as his basic thematic idea,

Bach constructed recitatives, ariosos, duets, choruses—weaving a spreading polyphonic fabric out of a single slender thread. Only at the end of the cantata was the basic hymn tune heard in its original form, when the choir, proclaiming it simply but with Bach's incomparable harmonization, was probably joined by the congregation.

Even though his immense collection of cantatas comprises by far the greater bulk of Bach's entire output, it remains the least known of all his work. The reason lies partly in the fact that the cantata as part of church worship is long since obsolete. It had passed from the liturgy of many churches even during Bach's lifetime. In modern times few countries have had musical organizations with the training and the traditional background necessary for adequate performances of Bach's cantatas. These works require soloists of exceptional talent and intelligence, first-rate instrumentalists, and choruses equipped to sing in a musical style of great difficulty—in short, a group as perfectly trained and organized as a modern symphony orchestra.

## IX

On the afternoon of Good Friday, 1729, the congregation of St. Thomas's assembled according to an ancient custom to hear a presentation of the Passion of Our Lord in musical form. In this particular year the biblical account was to be that contained in the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Bach was ready with a newly composed work, and around him in the organ-loft he had assembled an exceptionally large group of singers and instrumentalists. In addition to his regular chorus there was a second chorus made up of singers who did not usually perform at the church; organists were ready at both organs; and there were two orchestras, the usual group being augmented by players from the town, the school, and a local university. This impressive band of performers must have indicated to the congregation that the cantor had prepared something of an exceptional order.

One of Bach's pupils who was present at this first performance of the "St. Matthew Passion" recorded that the congregation was confused by what they heard, and left unappreciative. "Some high officials and well-born ladies in one of the galleries began to sing the first chorale with great devotion from their books. But as the theatrical music proceeded, they were thrown into the greatest wonderment, saying to each other, 'What does it all mean?' while one old lady, a widow, exclaimed, 'God help us! 'Tis surely an opera-comedy!'" It is doubtful if the cantor himself, retiring to his home in the Lenten twilight after his strenuous labours, had any realization of the magnitude of his accomplishment.

Representations of the Passion of Jesus Christ, both musical and dramatic, are as old as the Church itself. Medieval mystery plays, oratorios and musical Passions all stemmed from the same impulse—a desire to illustrate and act out the stories of the Bible, so that they could be made clear and vivid to the masses who no longer understood the Latin tongue of the Catholic service. The Passion as a musical form had begun in the early centuries of the Church as a simple dramatic recitation. Through the Middle Ages it had been joined to music, with the parts of the Evangelist, the Saviour, and the Disciples intoned in plainsong instead of merely recited. With the gradual enrichment of the

art of music the Passion evolved into an elaborate and extended form, employing soloists, chorus, and instrumentalists.

The exact number of Passions which Bach wrote is in doubt, despite exhaustive research by Bach experts. Only two are extant—the “St. John Passion”, which he composed hurriedly for his examination as cantor, and the “St. Matthew”. It is known that he composed a “St. Mark Passion”, which is lost. There is a strong possibility that he composed a fourth, also lost. However, it is certain that of all these works it was the “St. Matthew” which received his most mature inspiration, that it was the most elaborately conceived and the most carefully wrought. Thus we are fortunate in having Bach’s masterpiece in the Passion form, and the greatest work of its kind in existence.

The literary framework of the “St. Matthew Passion” indicates the process of evolution that must have gone on through the centuries which preceded it. Composers obviously had grown tired of repetitions of the same words from the Gospels describing the Passion; they sought to vary and to enrich the scenario itself. Bach’s work indicates how this was done. The main burden of the story is taken directly from the Bible—from Chapters XXVI and XXVII of St. Matthew. These biblical verses are set to music by Bach in the form of recitatives, with the words of the Evangelist sung by a tenor and those of Jesus by a bass. Interspersed between these verses are short poems, not from the Bible but from the pen of Picander, a religious writer of the period. Bach set these in the form of arias and choruses with orchestral accompaniment; and in essence they are a sympathetic commentary, like that of the chorus in the Greek drama, upon the biblical story as it unfolds. Finally, several of the old Lutheran chorales are also set between the recitatives and arias. These were sung by the chorus, joined probably by the congregation.

The framework of a Passion was thus a piece of literary joining which required considerable skill. The man who made Bach’s libretto was one Christian Friedrich Henrici, who wrote under the pen name of Picander. He was a post-office official and tax-collector. On the side he amused himself by writing satirical verse, some of it scandalously vulgar. Quite incongruously he turned to religious poetry, writing one of the most popular sets of cantata texts. Bach knew Picander well, and most of his Leipzig cantatas are to this writer’s words.

Like the church cantata, the Passion was a dying form when Bach produced his masterpiece. It did not disappear from the liturgy of the churches as rapidly as the cantata, but it was definitely on the way out. In reality Bach said the last word, for in the whole history of religious music there is nothing to compare with his portrayal of the Passion of Jesus Christ. This work stands at the end of a long evolution of devotional music; it is modern in complexity and scope, but its mystical fervour, its emotional ecstasy, its passionate absorption in the divine epic of the Christian faith—all this is medieval in spirit. That spirit was soon to vanish from music, just as a century before Bach’s time it had begun to disappear from the art of painting.

For Bach the Passion of Jesus Christ was no mere religious allegory; it was a drama of reality, and its poignancy touched the deepest chords of his nature and his lifelong faith. In the “St. Matthew Passion” he is first of all a tonal dramatist, striving to bring to life with all the power and vividness at his command the personal portrait as well as the epic tragedy of the Man of Sorrows. He took full advantage of the tragic and dramatic side of the story; in fact, it is astonishing how nearly operatic in the modern sense many of his devices are.

But the focal point of the entire work remains always the portrait of the Saviour. Through the long and complex score—the swirling masses of choral polyphony; the arias with their incredible richness of texture, and their adorning obbligatos of violin, oboe, and flute; the devotional chorales, strewn through the score (in Terry's phrase) "like jewels of price"—through all this gorgeousness it is nevertheless the music accompanying the words of Jesus which achieves the inspirational apex of the entire score. By the simplest means Bach attains his ends. When the Evangelist relates his story it is fairly simple recitative, accompanied by sparse chords from the orchestra. When the voice of Jesus is heard it is always to the accompaniment of soft string passages. No more moving music has ever been written for the human voice. The brooding sadness, the infinite compassion of the Saviour are limned in these vocal lines; while around Him, in the superb harmonies of the strings, glows the nimbus of divinity. In this portrait Bach is like a Rembrandt of the tonal art. He had seen in his own heart the piercing vision of the Man he was portraying; he had enveloped his subject with his own boundless sympathy.

The "St. Matthew Passion" had a few performances in the Leipzig churches while Bach was still alive, but it seems to have made no special impression. After the composer's death it lay silent and forgotten for more than three quarters of a century. On Good Friday, 1829, exactly a century after its première, Mendelssohn revived it with a performance in Berlin. With that event began the resurrection of Bach's music for the modern world.

Great as it is, the "St. Matthew Passion" does not stand alone in Bach's catalogue. One other work, the Mass in B minor, must be ranked with it as a summation of the composer's art.

In July 1733, Bach's eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, was installed as organist in a church in Dresden, and his father went along as his sponsor. While there Bach took the opportunity to ask a favour of his sovereign, Augustus III of Saxony. He wanted an appointment as Court composer, an honour which was finally conferred three years later. To pay homage he sent Augustus the manuscript of the Kyrie and Gloria of a Mass in B minor, together with a letter in which the composer referred to the work as a "trifling example of my skill in Musique".

Some time during the next few years (no one knows exactly how or when) the composer added to the Mass by constructing a Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. Much controversial ink has been shed on the question of how Bach, a staunch Lutheran, came to write a Roman Catholic Mass. Terry's explanation seems to be the most logical. The original Kyrie and Gloria, he points out, were in reality part of the Lutheran church service. When Bach expanded the work with a Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei he did not create a purely Roman Catholic Mass. For one thing the work is far too long for a church service, and it departs in a number of instances from the strict letter and order of the Roman liturgy. Terry believes that "the Mass is neither Roman nor Lutheran in intention and outlook, but the expression of a catholic Christianity. . . . Bach's genius was Teutonic in its inclination to complete a design" . . . and "in the compulsion to express himself in an art form which he had studied deeply".

The final Mass is gigantic in size. It consists of twenty-four movements, for chorus, orchestra, and five solo voices. Fifteen of the movements are for chorus, with six solos and three duets. A complete performance requires almost three hours. The work was not entirely original; the composer borrowed and



adapted about one third of the movements from his other works—chiefly from his church cantatas. Bach appears to have worked at the Mass over a period of five years, and the adaptations of the old sections as well as the composition of the new were done with extreme care, so that the vast architectural scheme could be satisfying in every detail.

The Mass in B minor contrasts strongly with the "St. Matthew Passion". The latter work is far more personal, both in style and approach. It relates a biblical story, first translated into the German language and then into illuminating and deeply expressive music. The Mass in B minor has, of course, no story to tell. It expounds in music the tenets of a great faith. Its text is in general the Ordinary of the Roman Mass. Bach takes those Latin words, phrase by phrase, and builds them into lengthy movements. The result is a series of stupendous murals, each affirming a phase of the beliefs which are the foundation stones of Christianity. In his "St. Matthew Passion" Bach had worked with the deeply human perceptions of a Rembrandt, and at times the mystical insight of a Leonardo; in the Mass in B minor he is a Michelangelo, the painter of colossal frescoes. His vision sweeps across vast distances, spanning heaven and earth.

The main burden of this structure is carried by the choruses. The arias and duets between them, though bearing the thread of literary continuity, are in reality moments of respite from the weight and impact of the choral masses. It is true that some of them fall below the inspirational level of the greatest arias in the "St. Matthew Passion", perhaps because the words of the liturgy are often dogmatic abstractions which almost defy musical setting. The best of them is the pathetic *Agnus Dei* for contralto.

The choruses dwarf everything else by comparison. All but one are in five vocal parts, with the orchestra adding a contrapuntal web of its own. The dimensions of the Mass, its exalted mood, the majesty of its subject, are all set in the first four measures of the *Kyrie Eleison* which open the work. There follows a long and stunning exposition, developed fugally, the vocal lines interweaving and overlapping in a bewildering pattern of sound as they proclaim again and again a powerful basic theme. The inspirational level is high, but Bach maintains and even surpasses it in the fourteen choral movements that follow. Some are exultations of the most brilliant sort, like the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*, or the dazzling fugue *Cum Sancto Spiritu*. Others are solid, broadly developed affirmations of dogmatic faith; for example, the *Credo*, which is based on a theme intoned in the church for more than fifteen hundred years. Still others are poignant and sorrowful—like the second *Kyrie Eleison*, the *Qui Tollis* and the *Et Incarnatus*—movements which are saturated with pathos and tenderness.

The Crucifixus stands alone in the entire range of musical expression. Bach's portrayal of the tragedy of Calvary exemplifies the enigma in which his art remains eternally wrapped, defying analysis and dissection. For this supreme moment in the history of mankind the composer had first to decide upon a musical form commensurate with the idea. He chose a *passacaglia*. A desolate falling theme in the bass, four measures long, is repeated, note for note, thirteen times, while above it the chorus intones its grief-stricken vision of the dying Saviour. Thus the basic structure of this music, which is unplumbed in emotional depth, is found to be a problem in pure musical mathematics.

In the nineteenth movement, the *Confiteor*, there is an adagio of twenty-six measures, to the words "*Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum*". Here Bach paints the prophecy of the great Resurrection. All contrapuntal movement

suddenly slows down; the music evolves through a long series of harmonic progressions which are a hundred years ahead of the composer's time in their daring modernity. The dead rise from their tombs for the Last Judgment.

The climax of the entire Mass (and of the composer's whole creative effort) is reached with the Sanctus. In a six-part chorus the scene of Paradise and the Almighty unfolds. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory." We behold the adoration of the heavenly hosts, with the higher voices of the chorus simulating the antiphony of the seraphim and the quiring angels, while the basses intone a vast theme that strides in octaves—gigantic pillars of tone upon which the nave of heaven rests. The movement is one great rolling thunder of music that seems to echo to the last boundaries of a limitless creation.

X

When Bach finished the Mass in B minor he was close on fifty years old and entering the last phase of his life. He never again attempted anything of such dimensions, and the swift current of his production began to abate somewhat. However, there was not the slightest sign of a flagging inspiration. He maintained his standard to the last days of his life.

After years of not composing for the organ he returned to that instrument, making several collections of his chorale preludes for publication. A number of these were based on the Lutheran Catechism hymns. They contain some of his weightiest music and are massive specimens of his mature organ style. Two works especially tower above the rest—"Aus tiefer Noth" ["In Deepest Need"], a gloomy and ascetic monument in six-part harmony with double pedal; and the incredible "Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist" ["Kyrie, Thou Spirit Divine"]. Bach himself never surpassed the latter work, either in the development of a mountaneous structure of tone from a few notes or in the building of dramatic climax.

In this last period of his life the composer also returned to the clavier. His most notable work was Part II of "The Well-Tempered Clavier", which appeared in 1744. This second set of twenty-four preludes and fugues is one of those rare species of the arts—a sequel which actually surpasses the original.

The so-called Goldberg Variations, published in 1743, were written to order. The Russian envoy to the Dresden Court was a certain Count Kayserling, who was tortured by chronic insomnia. He hired a clavichordist named Goldberg, a young pupil of Bach's, to play for him at night when he could not sleep. He also commissioned Bach to compose something that would soothe his nerves during the long wakeful hours. The fee was a generous one—a snuff-box containing one hundred louis d'or. Bach responded with a set of thirty variations, a work of such amplitude and quality that the Count certainly got his money's worth.

Goldberg must have been a performer of unusual ability, for these Variations bristle with technical difficulties. Until recently they were seldom performed in public, because they were originally written for harpsichord with two keyboards, which permitted the hands to cross each other in a manner impossible on the modern piano keyboard. Modern editors have found ways to surmount these difficulties and today the Variations are frequently played, despite their great length.

The main theme which Bach used for his thirty-room structure is a charming

Aria in G major, ornate with grace notes. The variations grow out of this central stem in a bewildering variety of melodic and rhythmic ideas. However, they are far from being simply variations. Digging under the surface of this luxuriantly blooming plant, one finds the real roots of the composer's ideas. The piece is actually a kind of passacaglia. A bass line of thirty-two notes governs the entire piece. It is not strictly adhered to, but nevertheless it forms the basis of all growth. Even that is not the end of the technical design. At every third variation a canon is introduced, that is, a strict imitation of the particular theme of the movement in another voice. There are nine of these canonic movements in all, each at a different interval, beginning with the unison and ending with the ninth. Moreover, there are movements in the form of a fughetto, a French overture and a quodlibet, the last being an ancient form in which the theme is combined contrapuntally with folk tunes. In this case Bach used two popular German songs.

From this elaborate structural framework it would be easy to infer that in the Goldberg Variations the old cantor was chiefly bent on showing off his technical wizardry, like a pedagogue compiling a dry textbook of mathematical problems and their solutions. The Variations could in fact be used as an instructional work for the use of ornamentation, variation, passacaglia, and canon. If that were their main virtue they would be dead these many years, instead of holding their place among the most beautiful works in keyboard literature. They prove again the paradoxical fact of Bach's creative processes—that mathematical problems were far from shackling his imagination; that actually they stimulated the flow of his ideas, with the result that many of his works which are most rigidly bound in technical fetters are the most poetic, emotional, and humanly expressive of all.

Some time during the last decade of his life Bach rounded off his organ works in the prelude-and-fugue style with four famous specimens. They are the preludes and fugues in E flat major, C major, E minor (the "Wedge" Fugue), and B minor. All are big works, representing the accumulated thought and the technical mastery of the composer's lifetime at his favourite instrument. The B minor Prelude and Fugue is probably the ripest of all. Its key, it is worth noting, was obviously a favourite of Bach's; he used it for many of his finest works. The E flat Fugue, popularly known as the "St. Anne" Fugue, is most frequently played. Speaking of this piece, and of the final entry of the main theme in the pedals—a thrilling, roaring declamation—Harvey Grace quotes an old English musician who said that it sounded "as if it ought to be fired off with cannon!"

In the spring of 1747, when Bach had reached the age of sixty-two, he enjoyed a unique personal triumph, on the occasion of his visit to the young King of Prussia, later to be known as Frederick the Great. This is one of the few episodes in the composer's life which is documented in some detail.

Bach went to Potsdam to see his son, Karl Philipp Emanuel, who was harpsichordist in Frederick's Court orchestra. The King, who later became the arch-Prussian war lord, was passionately fond of music. He had studied the flute from childhood (to the disgust of his tyrannical father, Frederick William I), and he tried seriously to become a composer. The story is told that one evening Frederick stood, flute in hand, before his orchestra, ready to play a concerto. The list of visitors to the Court was handed to him. Suddenly he exclaimed, "Gentlemen, old Bach is here!" The composer was quickly summoned from his son's house. He had no time to change from his travelling-clothes, a detail which embarrassed him in the presence of the King.

Frederick gave over the flute concerto and took the old man through his palace, showing him the new Silbermann claviers with hammer actions—fore-runners of the modern piano. Bach asked the King for a fugue subject upon which he might extemporize, and Frederick wrote one out for him. Bach's improvisation astonished the King, but the composer still held something in reserve. The next day he returned to the palace, and this time on a subject of his own he improvised a six-part fugue. Several times Frederick cried out in amazement, "There is only one Bach!"

A few months later the composer repaid the King with a graceful tribute. He sent Frederick "The Musical Offering", in which he used the King's theme as a subject of two fugues and a number of canons, adding for good measure a trio for flute, violin, and clavier.

The journey to Potsdam was Bach's last. He was an old man now, and the body that had borne such a heavy burden of labour for so many years began at last to fail. Even so, he was not ready to stop. He set to work upon "Die Kunst der Fuge" ["The Art of Fugue"], a study which would demonstrate with finality his mastery of the old form. The resulting work is one of the most unusual in music; it is a puzzle which remains unsolved because the composer died before its completion, leaving doubt about certain of his purposes.

One phase of the work is perfectly clear. By taking a single theme and treating it in a great variety of ways, developing it through all the devices known to fugal and canonic procedure, from the simplest to the most astonishingly intricate, Bach intended to expose, as it were, the mechanism of his art as a writer of fugue. However, when the work was published there was nothing to indicate for what instrument or instruments it might be intended. It was long believed, therefore, that "The Art of Fugue" was not intended to be played at all, but was instead a tremendous abstraction, aimed chiefly to instruct and to inform. Even Schweitzer found no aesthetic purpose in the work. He wrote, "It introduces us to a still and serious world, deserted and rigid, without colour, without light, without motion; it does not gladden, does not distract; yet we cannot break away from it."

Various modern editors have sought to prove that the piece is much more than cold theory. Some of them have scored it for instruments, and worked out completions of the final fugue left unfinished by Bach. The best proof that "The Art of Fugue" is suited to actual performance and is music in its fullest sense was an arrangement for chamber orchestra made in 1927 by Wolfgang Gräser, a young Swiss genius of music (and of mathematics, physics, and oriental languages), who killed himself in 1928 at the age of twenty-two. Convincing as his arrangement is, Gräser's is clearly not the last word on the subject, and "The Art of Fugue" is likely to fascinate and mystify students of music and Bach arrangers in particular for generations to come.

## XI

Bach did not complete "The Art of Fugue" because his eyesight began to fail. He was finally persuaded to consult an English oculist, Chevalier John Taylor, who was then visiting and practising in Germany. Early in 1750, Taylor performed an operation of some kind on Bach's eyes. The operation failed, and Bach emerged totally blind. The excruciating pain of the ordeal and the long confinement that followed broke down the composer's physical strength.

This same Taylor, a few years later, performed a similar operation on Handel. The results led Edward MacDowell to remark that Bach and Handel were in every way different, "except that they were born in the same year, and killed by the same doctor".

For weeks Bach lay in his bed, a broken man. During the year preceding the operation he had turned for the last time to his beloved chorale preludes, and in moments when his eyes would permit was copying and revising eighteen of them for the engraver. Contained in this collection are some of his finest examples in the form, among them the exquisite "Schmücke dich" ["Deck Thyself, My Soul, with Gladness"]. Almost a century later Robert Schumann heard this work performed by Mendelssohn, to whom he afterwards wrote, saying that around the old chorale hymn "hung winding wreaths of golden leaves, and such blissfulness was breathed from within it, that you yourself avowed that if life was bereft of all hope and faith, this one chorale would renew them for you. I was silent and went away dazed into God's acre, feeling acutely pained that I could lay no flower on his urn."

The last of the collection, "Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein" ["When We Are in Deepest Need"], remained unfinished during the last days when the blind composer lay waiting for death. Making his last effort, he dictated to his son-in-law the completion of this work, changing its title to that of another hymn on the same tune, "Vor deinen Thron tret' ich allhier" ["Before Thy Throne I Come"].

Ten days later, on the twenty-eighth day of July, 1750, Bach died. He was buried in the ancient graveyard of St. John's Church in Leipzig.

## XII

Neglect of Bach's music began almost with the instant of his death. Public interest in it was so small that when Karl Philipp Emanuel published "The Art of Fugue" only a handful of copies were purchased, and he finally sold the plates for the value of the metal. The oldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann (who later became a drunkard), cared so little for his father's work that he lost a number of the manuscripts of the cantatas which had been willed to him. The sons did not even care for their stepmother. Anna Magdalena died ten years later in poverty. Gradually the manuscripts and published works of the father dropped from sight; soon the place of his grave was forgotten. During the next seventy-five years the name "Bach" meant not Johann Sebastian but Karl Philipp Emanuel.

It would be wrong to assume that the age which neglected Bach's music must be accused of a lack of aesthetic perception. Bach belonged to the baroque era, and he arrived on the scene in time to sum up that style in music. Long before he had finished, the baroque had begun to fade. The younger composers found they could no longer express themselves in the formulas which a century of usage had worked dry. They wanted no more of fugues and chorale preludes, of toccatas, passacaglias, and chaconnes. They were as sick of them as churchgoers were tired of cantatas and Passions.

In France the baroque age had passed into the rococo, impelled by the enormous personal force of Louis XIV. Art, music, and architecture all reflected the spirit of a new age that was to rule Europe. The baroque had been ornamental and florid, with its lush, decorative exterior covering a platform

of massive strength. It had aimed to impress, to glorify, to move deeply. The rococo was also decorative; but it was delicate, refined, poetic, with an elegant charm that was essentially shallow. Its purpose was to entertain, to beguile.

The German composers could not help but be impressed by these changes, but their own version of the rococo was a much more sober product than the French. Theirs was chiefly a rationalizing process, and part of it took the form of simplification. New ideas and procedures had to be sought and explored. Polyphony, which had ruled musical thought for a thousand years, began to crumble. Bach himself had exhausted the possibilities of contrapuntal science; no one could follow his purely mathematical skill. The New Music with which his sons were experimenting would be based instead on homophony, a musical pattern built upon a single line of melody instead of several. The great new form which arose was the sonata; soon the symphonic orchestra would appear, and the string quartet. For the next century the best creative minds would be engaged in the development and exploitation of these new concepts of musical form and medium. The opera would flourish as never before, while music for the church would rapidly decline.

In this evolution Bach's music had nothing to offer. It belonged to a vanished past whose ideas and methods the newer composers were trying to avoid and to forget. Moreover, only a small portion of it had been published in the composer's lifetime, so that it could influence little even those whose predilections might be towards the music of the past.

Almost a century had to pass before the wheel would turn full circle. When composers like Chopin, Mendelssohn, Schumann, and Liszt, all romantic emotionalists, discovered Bach and the emotion that lay under his technique, they regarded him with amazement and adoration. Schumann declared that music owed him a debt as great as religion owed to its founder; for Wagner he was "the most stupendous miracle in all music". With Mendelssohn's revival of the "St. Matthew Passion" in 1829 the Bach resurrection began, and all through the rest of the nineteenth century the work of discovery and compilation and editing went on. It was not until 1894, after long search, that the composer's bones were found and identified in St. John's graveyard. By that time he needed no epitaph but his name.

The history of mankind has recorded no greater achievement than his, in that entire realm of human endeavour which is called art.

# Haydn

1732—1809

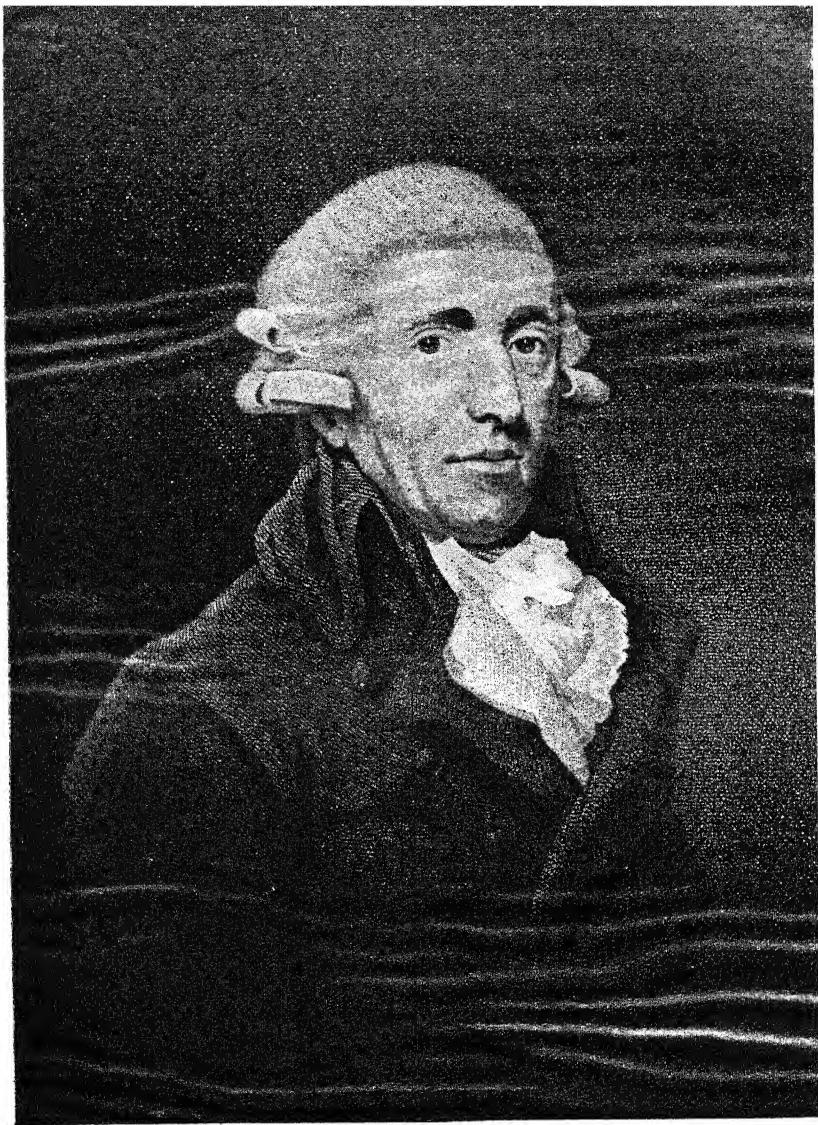


IN THE YEAR 1740, WHEN JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH WAS WRESTLING WITH THE difficulties that beset the cantor of a school full of rowdy boys, there was a certain eight-year-old peasant lad whom he would have delighted to add to his choir. At that time the boy was just entering the choir of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, and Bach died, of course, without ever hearing the remotest whisper of his name—Franz Joseph Haydn, the man whose destiny it was to crystallize the New Music, which displaced and for almost a century completely obliterated Bach's; the man under whose hands the noblest of musical media, the symphonic orchestra, was to be established and modelled and projected into the future; the man who was to give similar form and spirit and impetus to the string quartet.

He was born in the village of Rohrau, in Lower Austria, some time during the night of March 31st and the morning of April Fools' Day, 1732, five weeks after the birth of George Washington. His father was a wheelwright, his mother a cook in the household of a nobleman in the vicinity. Joseph was the second of twelve children. It was a poor and crowded home in all probability, for when Joseph was only five years old his family gave him away. A schoolmaster relative noticed him one day imitating the gestures of a fiddler on a make-believe instrument and offered to take his musical education in charge. The child never again lived with his father and mother. During the next two years, at a country school, he learned to play the harpsichord and the violin, and to sing in the choir at Mass. It was hard schooling; Haydn said in after life that "there was more flogging than food".

When he was eight, opportunity arrived for the little boy working his way up in the world. It came in the person of the Kapellmeister of the great St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, who was searching for boys for his choir. He engaged Master Haydn and took him to Vienna.

At St. Stephen's, Haydn's life was similar to that of Bach's youngsters at St. Thomas's. In exchange for their work in the choir the boys were boarded, lodged, and taught the elements of catechism, Latin, and singing. They also learned, at the hard work-bench of experience, that churches supported by municipalities were generally pinched for funds; and that economizing meant short rations and hunger for the boys. To gain a little extra money for an occasional square meal they were permitted to sing in street serenades, at banquets, and in the homes of the wealthy and noble, where they often filled the



[Rischgitz Studios]

JOSEPH HAYDN  
Painting by Hoppner





GEORGE FREDERICK HANDEL  
Painting by Hudson

double role of choirist and scullery helper. Thus Haydn's first hearing of chamber and symphonic music, upon which he was to exert so profound an influence, was probably gained (as one of his biographers has remarked) "while he was running with an armful of plates from the kitchen to the dining-room, in the mansion of some great nobleman".

In spite of his talent, Haydn received no special treatment at St. Stephen's. Once the Kapellmeister proposed that he be emasculated to preserve his excellent soprano voice, but the boy escaped that catastrophe when his father refused permission. He admitted in his old age that he had never had a real master in music. He studied the harpsichord and violin along with the rest of the boys, but his first childish attempts at composition were laughed at rather than encouraged. However, he had a sharp eye and a quick, eager mind; like the boy Bach at Lüneburg, he learned by listening to everything that went on in the choir.

When Haydn was seventeen years old he found out what eighteenth-century churches had in store for choirboys when their voices broke. Since he was no longer of any use he was put out abruptly on to the streets of Vienna. His wardrobe consisted of three shirts and an old coat; he had no money, no voice to sing for a living, and not enough skill on a musical instrument to play for one. Starvation was staring him straight in the face. But Haydn was of Austrian peasant stock, accustomed to accept the order of things as they were. He slept that night in the open air; and then a friend who was a church singer and almost as poverty-bitten as himself took him in to share a wretched lodging in a garret.

That was the lowest point in Joseph Haydn's life. From then on he was to rise in the world, slowly but steadily, until he became one of the most illustrious men of his time. Meanwhile, he did not waste time arguing with his own fate. Calmly, uncomplainingly, he went through life, one of the most industrious, orderly, and good-natured of men. He was never proud; the most menial position meant for him not a degradation but an opportunity by which he might move upwards. He had health, serenity of soul, and the inward driving force of genius. For him these were the ingredients of happiness.

In one other respect he was fortunate, for in any other city except Vienna he would very likely have starved. The Austrian capital was then the most civilized metropolis in Europe. For several centuries it had been a catch basin for all the good-natured, easy-living peoples of the south—the Bohemians, Hungarians, Magyars, Moravians, Croats, Czechs, Bavarians—those who were at least slightly more interested in good food, beautiful houses, and generally pleasant surroundings than they were in commerce or war. With good food and good wine there must inevitably be song, and while making their city a distinguished centre of gastronomy and civic beauty they also proceeded to fill it with splendid music. When Haydn went there as a boy it seemed that everyone in Vienna wanted musical entertainment. Every café had its singer or small orchestra, every palace its Kapelle. No person of wealth or rank would think of giving a dinner party without calling in a group of singers or choirboys. As a result the streets swarmed with serenaders who sang and played and danced for the delight of the Viennese. And that is how Joseph Haydn scratched for his living for ten years. He joined the serenaders in the streets; he sang at dinner parties; he fiddled for dances; he gave music lessons to children—anything to stay out of the potter's field.

All the while he was also struggling for a chance to learn musical composition. By a lucky chance he came to know Niccolò Porpora, one of the most celebrated

musicians in Vienna. Porpora was an Italian who had written fifty-three operas and had been a rival of Handel's in the opera-mad town of London. He was most famous as a teacher of singing, at which art he very likely had no peer. He kept one of his pupils, the male soprano Caffarelli, working at a single page of vocal exercises for six years, then turned him out to become one of the greatest singers of the age, the idol of London and Italy. When Haydn came to know him, Porpora was old, disillusioned, and near the end of his career; he was dirty and miserly, with a vile temper and a vocabulary made up of verbal sewage. Haydn became his accompanist and valet. In return, Porpora corrected the young man's exercises in composition. It was while accompanying Porpora's pupils on the harpsichord that Haydn probably learned most—listening to the filthy old tyrant expound the secrets of the vocal art, absorbing the priceless doctrine that melody is the soul of music, and that, unless melody is properly projected, music remains earthbound.

## II

When he was twenty-seven the tide of Haydn's life suddenly turned. He became composer and director of music in the household of a certain Count von Morzin. It was an attractive post, with a salary of two hundred florins a year, residence in summer at a lovely castle in Bohemia, and a small orchestra of a dozen players at his disposal, for whom he wrote divertimenti and his first symphonies.

Haydn had arrived. Never again was he to feel the screws of economic necessity; so he celebrated his good fortune by marrying. He made an odd match. One of the men who had befriended him in Vienna was a wigmaker named Keller. Haydn gave music lessons to Keller's two daughters, and he fell in love with the younger one. But when he found that she had no intention of marrying and wanted instead to become a nun, he became engaged (with the father's urging) to the elder sister, who was three years his senior. Other men have taken wives under similar prosaic circumstances, less spurred by passionate ardour than they are floated towards matrimony on the currents of indifference or resignation; but few have made a less fortunate choice than Haydn did when he married Anna Maria Keller in 1760. She turned out to be one of the most notorious shrews in history, bore him no children, spent his money extravagantly, and had no inkling of the fact that her husband was a genius. She used his music manuscripts for curlpapers and as underlays when she baked cakes. Haydn reacted to her just as any man of an amiable and uncombative nature would. He put up with her for forty years, until her death in 1800.

After two years with Count von Morzin, Haydn captured one of the most brilliant musical posts in all Europe. He became Vice-Kapellmeister in the service of the great Esterhazy family, whose wealth, prestige, and noble history placed them almost on a par with reigning monarchs. They owned vast estates in Hungary, comprising immense tracts of land, hundreds of towns and villages, and a score of castles. It was to the ancestral castle of Eisenstadt, thirty miles from Vienna, that Prince Paul Anton Esterhazy brought Haydn in 1761. A year later the Prince died and was succeeded by his brother, Nicolaus "the Magnificent".

Nicolaus was not by any means an evil man, but he was one of the foremost in the group of aristocrats who by their shortsightedness brought part of the

European political system (and their own plushy social monopoly) down in ruins. The Esterhazy income was derived from the taxation of thousands of peasants on the family's Hungarian estates. It was so enormous that Nicolaus could not possibly spend it all—even after he had indulged himself in the usual fantastic luxuries of the time, including a wardrobe of uniforms studded with diamonds. There was not even a costly war going on; so Nicolaus decided to build himself another palace, even though he already had twenty or more. In the eighteenth century, when an enormously wealthy Germanic prince set about building a new palace, there could be only one model in his mind—Versailles. The French kings and all their fabulous doings had a fatal fascination for the nobility and royalty of the rest of Europe, especially the Germans. From the time of Louis XIV there was a general aping of French dress, speech, manners, morality, and customs which even a hard-headed Prussian like Frederick the Great did not escape. At Frederick's Court no language but French could be spoken; he regarded German as a medium of social intercourse fit only for peasants. Even his preoccupation with musical composition and flute-playing was an accomplishment considered fashionably French.

And so when Prince Nicolaus planned his new palace a few miles from Eisenstadt his idea was to outdo if possible *Le Roi Soleil*. Esterhazy (as it was called) was completed in 1766, and it was a masterpiece of architectural splendour, sumptuous appointments, and unnecessary expense. It contained more than a hundred rooms, all filled with art treasures, priceless tapestries, beautiful furniture, and books. Acres of land round the palace were given over to lawns, fountains, and flower gardens, to hermitages, grottoes, temples, hothouses, and deer parks. There were also two separate theatres. One was an opera house large enough to seat four hundred spectators; the other was a marionette theatre, completely equipped with large marionettes, elaborate manipulating devices and scenery.

In the midst of this dream palace of artificial splendour Haydn lived and worked for the next quarter of a century. His position there needs explaining at the outset. He had no social standing whatever; he was merely one of the servants. He ranked as an "upper servant", it is true, but between him and, say, one of the guests of the Esterhazys there was a fathomless gulf. This was the common and accepted lot of all musicians of the time. They remained on a level with cooks, valets, and flunkies until Beethoven (aided by the spirit of the French Revolution) demanded and got the social distinction that he knew he deserved.

Haydn's job, moreover, was far from a sinecure. A place like Esterhazy was like a great modern hotel in that it required a corps of trained men to run it. The various chiefs in charge of the food, the wine, the gardens, the servants, the Prince's clothing, the musical entertainment, all had to be men with executive ability in addition to their special talents. The duties of the Kapellmeister (to which position Haydn was promoted in 1766) were particularly arduous. He had full charge of the orchestra, which meant that he had to see that they behaved themselves and that they all appeared neatly dressed in the Prince's livery. He had to look after the music and the musical instruments; and twice a day he had to wait upon His Serene Highness in an antechamber to receive orders for the day. He presided over the orchestra rehearsals, directing all performances at the palace and in the opera house and marionette theatre. For all these functions he had to write large quantities of music.

The Prince was very proud of his Kapelle and its conductor; their presence

and musical excellence were part of the picture of opulent splendour for which Esterhaz became famous throughout Europe. So Haydn was kept occupied to supply the musical entertainment that his Prince demanded. The catalogue of his works produced for the Esterhazys is enormous—some sixty symphonies, forty string-quartets, five masses, eleven operas, and incidental music to a number of marionette plays, several dozen piano sonatas, and no less than one hundred and seventy-five compositions featuring an instrument called the baryton. This was one of the viol family, about the size of a 'cello; it had six gut strings which were fingered, and beneath them six wire strings which vibrated in sympathy. Prince Nicolaus was passionately addicted to playing this instrument and fancied himself a virtuoso on it, hence Haydn's enormous number of baryton works. Haydn even learned to play this instrument, hoping thereby to please his employer. Instead the result was a chilling disapproval; Nicolaus made it plain that he preferred no rivalry. It is possible that the composer's enforced labours for the baryton over a period of many years finally gave him something equivalent to what the modern physician terms anaphylactic shock—i.e. the excessive eating of a single food until it suddenly becomes utterly repellent to the consumer. After Prince Nicolaus died, Haydn never again wrote for the baryton, and it was one of the instruments which he always barred from his writings for symphonic orchestra. Practically all his baryton works were lost in two fires which destroyed part of Esterhaz, in 1768 and 1776.

### III —

Working away year after year at Esterhaz, calmly and placidly, but with immense energy and thoroughness, Haydn produced some of the most beautifully wrought music in existence. He also proved himself one of the most original creative artists of his time, whose inventions were to affect all music and musicians for the next two hundred years. Haydn himself said, "My Prince was always satisfied with my work. Not only had I the encouragement of his constant approval, but being at the head of an orchestra entirely under my orders, I was able to make experiments and try effects. Cut off from the rest of the world, I had nothing to worry about, and I was compelled to be original."

His greatest work was done in connection with the symphony orchestra, of which he has always been known as the father. The symphony orchestra as we know it did not exist before Haydn's time. The composers of the early eighteenth century were in fact only beginning to learn the possibilities of many of the musical instruments and their use in combination. The extreme beginnings of the modern orchestra can be traced to the early seventeenth century, when groups of instruments were used to accompany the first Italian operas. Monteverdi, one of the most startling innovators in music history, actually used in 1608 an orchestra of thirty-six pieces to accompany one of his operas, with the first orchestral score—a stroke of prescience that musicologists marvel at today. From him, along with other remarkable effects (including the pizzicato, and the tremolo for the bow), came the idea of a body of strings as a foundation for the orchestra. By the time of Bach and Handel this idea was well established, as indicated by the development of the concerto grosso.

One of the most difficult problems of instrumentation in the early eighteenth century was that of selection. A composer was faced with a variety of instruments of every description, some remarkably articulate and musically pleasing,

others hopelessly archaic and unreliable. For example, there was the family of viols and their various progeny. They comprised at least a dozen different instruments of various sizes, shapes, ranges, and tone quality, including the violin, the violino piccolo (a small violin tuned a fifth higher), the viola, the viola pomposa (with five strings), the viola d'amore (which had two sets of seven strings, one set fingered, the other set vibrating in sympathy), the baryton (already described), the viola da gamba (a small 'cello with five or six strings), the violoncello, and the bass viol. There was also an important group of plucked strings—the lute, the theorbo (a large bass lute), and the inevitable harpsichord. The wind instruments were less in number; but their problems arose chiefly from the fact that most of them were extremely limited in their technical resources, and often they were so poorly constructed that even in the most carefully trained orchestras they were expected to sound out of tune.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, when Haydn began to write his first symphonies, the string group had been considerably weeded out in most orchestral groups. Violins, violas, 'cellos, and basses had demonstrated their fitness and superior resourcefulness and now formed a fairly permanent body of string tone. Of the plucked strings, only the harpsichord remained. Composers were trying to find a combination of woodwind and brass tone to match their excellent string tone, but the solution still eluded them. One famous Kapelle of the year 1740 had forty-three instruments, of which eight were trumpets and five trombones—more than Wagner used a century and a quarter later in his gigantic orchestra for *The Ring of the Nibelung*. An opera orchestra of 1754, of about the same size, had five oboes and five bassoons.

It remained for Haydn to find at last a workable combination, and to establish the matrix from which all symphonic music was henceforth to be built. Shortly after he came to Eisenstadt his Kapelle consisted of five violins, one 'cello, one double bass, one flute, one oboe, two bassoons, and two horns. As the years went by and his ideas on orchestration gradually developed, the Kapelle was enlarged. When he had reached the height of his career, on the occasion of his first visit to London in 1791, he was writing for an orchestra of thirty-five to forty players, comprising sixteen violins, four violas, three 'cellos, four double basses, two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, and two tympani. Later, following the lead of Mozart, he added two clarinets to his woodwind section.

It is noteworthy that, of all the instruments which Haydn ignored in his symphonic writing, all except one have become obsolete and have never succeeded in re-entering the orchestra. The exception was the trombone, which, curiously enough, Haydn used in his operas but refused admission to his symphonies. (Mozart did exactly the same thing; and it remained for Beethoven to establish this instrument in the symphonic brass section.) The only instrument which Haydn used and which has since dropped out of the orchestra was the harpsichord. But even with Haydn the harpsichord survived more as a conventional appendage than as a necessity. It had long been the custom for the leader of an orchestral group (often the composer) to conduct from the harpsichord. His part generally consisted of a kind of musical shorthand known as "figured bass", which provided him with the proper chords to be struck as the music progressed, and by which he could establish the rhythm and tempo, and generally keep the orchestra playing together. In Haydn's later years, however, ensemble playing had improved to such an extent that the harpsichord as a rhythmic policeman was no longer needed, and it quietly disappeared from the scene.

As we look at the orchestras which Haydn used and compare them with our symphony orchestras of today, it is strikingly apparent that the latter are simply a magnification of Haydn's, with all the various choirs expanded to meet the terrific demands of the later emotionalists like Beethoven, Wagner, Berlioz, and Liszt. Here and there instruments have been added to strengthen the bass—the trombones, the tuba, bass clarinet, and contrabassoon; and an occasional new instrument like the English horn appears to provide a special solo voice; otherwise our symphony orchestra is merely the youthful Haydn Kapelle grown to manhood.

In his treatment of orchestral forces Haydn also set standards which composers follow to this day. For years he studied the tonal qualities and resources of the various instruments, something that very few of his predecessors understood at all. They usually treated all of them in much the same way, giving them the same work to do, in spite of the fact that some were best fitted to play long, sustained notes, while others were valuable for their agility. Bach, for example, often wrote for the trumpet as if it had the dexterity of a violin—passages so florid and so completely outside the native possibilities of the instrument that even the most gifted modern trumpeters attempt them only at the risk of apoplexy. Haydn learned to give each instrument the work it was best fitted to do. To the horns he assigned the long, sustained notes that form a foundation of chords under the rest of the orchestra. Occasionally he also gave them small melodic passages, delightful contrasts to the string and woodwind tone, but always made up of notes easily within the compass of the instrument. Trumpets, too, he used to sustain and build up the general volume of orchestral tone, but he saved their brilliant high notes to add dramatic touches to the climaxes.

It was in his handling of the woodwinds that the music-master of Esterhaz performed his greatest instrumental feats. First of all, he built up the choir in size and power until it could really balance the strings. This meant that he could drop the strings entirely for a number of bars at a time and give the whole burden of work to the woodwinds, thus affording a fine contrast and giving the ear of the listener a rest from the continual string tone. It also meant that he could colour and modify the string tone in soft passages by adding a woodwind or two to the various string parts. And of course there was his exquisite use of the woodwinds in solo passages, where they sang the melody as only woodwinds can, and for which he discovered how to thin out and subdue the accompanying strings to give the melody the best possible support. These and countless other devices Haydn worked out during his years of toiling at Esterhaz, until the symphonic orchestra had become an instrument of marvellous variety, flexibility, and resourcefulness; capable of a magnificent range of tonal colour and volume, from the exquisite to the grand; full of subtlety and surprise, articulate to a degree undreamed of by any composer before his time.

#### IV

While this splendid early growth of the symphonic orchestra was going on under his hand, Joseph Haydn was also contributing to an even more profound metamorphosis, which was affecting the entire art of music. This was the gradual conquest of the polyphonic style of composition by the New Music, or homophonic style. Not nearly enough has been written about this evolution to make

it understood today other than by music specialists. The average listener realizes, even without technical knowledge of music, that early eighteenth-century composers like Bach and Handel wrote their music in a style which sounds to us rather archaic; and that the next generation, Haydn and Mozart, and their contemporaries, were writing in a style that was totally different and much more modern. The change which had taken place in that short span of years was nothing less than a revolution—one as fundamental to music as the French and American revolutions were to political history.

For centuries, up to the time when Sebastian Bach had reached middle age, most serious music had been polyphonic, i.e. made up of two or more strands developed from the same melody and woven, by simultaneous presentation, into a harmonious rope of sound, with no one strand of necessity more important or dominating than another. This art of polyphony finally reached a stage where further progress seemed impossible. An overwhelming urge began to impel composers towards a simplification of musical style. Accelerating the movement was the rise in popularity of the keyboard instruments in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—the clavichord and the harpsichord—instruments which, by their very nature, demanded a simpler type of music. It was a comparatively easy matter for a choir of voices or an orchestra to perform polyphonic music and to keep the various threads of counterpoint clearly defined and easily audible; but to a single performer on a keyboard instrument the problem of handling more than a few polyphonic strands becomes insoluble—as anyone can prove for himself by playing on a piano some of the five-voiced fugues in J. S. Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier".

The simplification which finally took place assumed the form of homophony. Instead of a number of strands, all co-existing, all developed from the same musical germ, one of the melodic strands took the leads to the exclusion of the rest. The others were condensed and contracted into chords, which supported the chief melody at intervals, like piers under a long bridge. One of the great advantages of this idea lay with the listener, who could obviously follow much more easily the progress of a single melody, carefully featured and framed, as it were, than that of a group of melodies all sounding much alike because of their derivation from the same thematic idea.

The homophonic type of music had been developing for a long time. It finally burgeoned into widespread use with the rise of Italian opera, which was built upon the idea of a single dominating melody supported by a simple accompaniment of chords. The older composers of the early eighteenth century still clung to their polyphonic style, resisting change; but the New Music spread like wildfire among the younger composers who were beginning their careers as J. S. Bach was ending his. Chief among them were several of Bach's sons. It was Karl Philipp Emanuel Bach in particular who laid one of the cornerstones of music history by his work in connection with the supreme structural design in the homophonic style—the sonata form. Joseph Haydn, following the lead of Emanuel Bach, helped to set music firmly and irrevocably in the homophonic pattern which has endured to this day. Coming as he did from Austria, which was steeped in Italian traditions, Haydn understood the newer ideas of melody; but he also had the Germanic concepts of rounded craftsmanship. The style which he evolved in his maturity combined the open melodic freedom of homophony and a modified counterpoint derived from the old age of polyphony.

Haydn was thus one of the happiest exemplifications in history of the right man arriving at the right time. The early development of homophony depended



upon simplification, upon clarification; it called for a process of clearing away and thinning out. In a sense, the thick, overgrown, and wildly luxuriant garden of baroque polyphony was now to be pruned and weeded, made completely over into a formal garden, with clipped hedges, with flowers and lawns neatly and symmetrically balanced; and the whole landscape was to be laid open to the sky in designs of simplified loveliness. No one was better qualified to perform such work than Haydn, by birth a man of peasantlike simplicity and directness; a man to whom beauty meant order, transparency, moderation, clarity.

Like every other great composer, Haydn was first of all a melodist. He said himself that "it is the air which is the charm of music, and it is that which is most difficult to produce. The invention of a fine melody is the work of genius"—a remark which ought to be painted in red on the walls of every music school in existence. For the inspiration of much of his melodic material Haydn went to an unusual source for his time: the folk tunes which came to him from the farmers and villagers around Esterhaz, and from his own peasant ancestry. These simple songs saturate the whole body of his instrumental work. But even they do not explain the clarity and the spontaneity of his melodic style. It used to be the habit to speak of Haydn's melodies as if they were artlessly simple, lacking in subtlety; but only the blatantly ignorant make that mistake today. To examine closely some of his melodic ideas which seem most obvious is to discover that they are not simple at all, but that they have been subjected to the most scrupulous turning and polishing and perfecting. He never set down a note that he did not ponder over.

## V

With the growth of orchestras and the improvement of the various clavier, composers had long been groping towards some large, well-organized musical form which would be commensurate in scope and dignity with their splendid new media. There were already in use a number of forms which embraced more than a single movement—e.g. the suite, the divertimento, the cassation, the concerto grosso, and the sonata. Most of these were loosely conceived structures, the details of organization and the exact number of movements often varying with individual composers. It was Karl Philipp Emanuel Bach who finally established the sonata as the leading multiple form, with a series of brilliant essays written for the clavier. At about the same time a kindred structure had grown up which was in reality a sonata for orchestra, and this had taken the name of a symphony.

There is no need to trace here the precise details of K. P. E. Bach's contribution to these developments. Suffice to say that what he started Haydn expanded, strengthened, perfected. Haydn was chiefly responsible for the peculiar thematic organization of the first movement of the sonata. In the old polyphonic music most of the forms had been based on the development of a single theme and its variants. The first movement of the new sonata provided an important innovation: it was built on two themes. Moreover, these themes were contrasting and separately presented. The first was rapid, brilliant, declamatory; while the second was quieter, more lyrical, less bold. The presentation and development of the two themes was carried on according to a definite set of rules, but with enough leeway to afford scope for the composer's imagination. What this so-called sonata form really provided was a new element of contrast—a richness of

variety in melody, mood, rhythm, and key—which had been lacking in the older single-movement forms of the past. It was one of the best ideas in pure form that music has so far produced.

Haydn loved the sonata form, and he spent the better part of fifty years experimenting with it, until he had produced more than a hundred symphonies, almost as many string quartets, and a host of small chamber and clavier pieces based on it. The symphonies and the quartets were the works which made him famous all over Europe, and which were to set the standards and permeate the thought of composers for the next half century.

Because Haydn was the first of the great instrumental classicists of the eighteenth century, it is not generally realized that he was considered in his day something of a radical, an "ultramodernist". This was because of his constant experimentation with the forms in which he worked, as well as with the instruments which he used. Though he helped to establish the sonata form and the minuet and the rondo, for example, he by no means froze them into rigid patterns. The student who analyses his symphony or string quartet movements quickly discovers that the composer varied them endlessly in details of construction—altering, expanding, contracting—always seeking new conceptions of purely formal beauty.

## VI

It is not an easy matter to evaluate Haydn's music today, especially to the satisfaction of many listeners who are willing to admit the historical importance of the man and his accomplishments, but who are nevertheless disquieted by a failure to be greatly moved by the music itself. Many people today are bored by Haydn's music, and they are apt to attach insincerity to the motives of others who claim to love it.

The truth is that we are not living in the best age for the appreciation of an art of Haydn's type. The modern world of the arts has just passed through a century of the most intense and variegated romanticism, followed by several decades of a violent realism. In the broad cyclical movement through which all the arts continually pass we are now probably at a point exactly opposite the age of formal, elegant classicism to which Haydn belonged. One of the distinguishing features of the arts on our side of the circumference is the complete freedom which the artist is allowed in expressing his emotions. We have in fact become accustomed to emotional orgies—in music, painting, literature, and even sculpture. Haydn's age was one of emotional restraint; the fashion in music was for abstractions, for classic designs devoid of sensuous, emotional, or pictorial qualities. The listener today has to bear these facts in mind if he is ever to understand what a composer like Haydn was trying to accomplish.

In writing as he did, Haydn was not only expressing the artistic spirit of his times; he was also acutely conscious of the exact conditions for which his music was being created. Most of it was intended to sound in a drawing-room, and for the pleasure of persons whose conduct was conventionalized into all sorts of mannered elegances and artificial restraints. These people were not expected to be deeply moved by his music; they had merely to be entertained, beguiled for a short time from the boredom of the general conversation or the vacuity of their own thoughts. Had Haydn tried to give them something emotional as, say, a deeply felt religious chorale prelude in the manner of Bach, he would have startled

his audience and displeased his Prince. He would have been guilty of a breach of etiquette. Since he could not call upon strong emotion, religious or otherwise, he had to depend entirely upon design—upon the beauty inherent in symmetry, balance, and classic grace.

This type of beauty (of which Haydn was one of the supreme masters in music) does in itself call forth emotion in the sympathetic listener. True, it is a pure and rarefied emotion, too thin and subtle for many in this age; but for those who do find it, it is a lifelong fascination and delight. Musicians themselves are fortunate in this respect. The most ardent admirers of the Haydn type of music are generally those gifted enough to be able to play it. For them there are few deeper joys in music than the close-up view of this beautifully refined art in all its subtle ramifications.

The real lover of Haydn's music is always careful to take it for exactly what it is—a product brimming with melodic freshness and charm, exquisite in design, perfect in craftsmanship, and definitely one-sided. It is one-sided not alone in style but in mood. The composer's good nature was bound to permeate his work, and his music has always been famous for its joyousness. He was an optimist by nature and habit, and that fact is perfectly evident in the vast majority of his works. There is a school of criticism today which tries to prove that there is much more—emotionally—in his music than meets the eye; that there are hidden away under the surface of his symphonies and string quartets depths and profundities of thought, and that the popular conception of the genial, blithe-spirited "Papa Haydn" of the history books is somehow a calumny. It is hard to follow this reasoning, especially when Haydn himself never indicated that he was trying to be either heavily emotional or profound—except in the two oratorios, "The Creation" and "The Seasons", which were the closing works of his life.

A revealing clue to the composer's own attitude is found in his sixteen Masses. Although Haydn was an ardent Catholic he was not a man to whom religion meant the very heart of life, as it did to Bach; his cheery nature and his optimism were proof against morbid thoughts of hell-fire and damnation. Consequently his Masses have (for some) a disturbing secular quality that can only be described as lively. Mendelssohn said that one of them was "scandalously merry". Another ends in a presto in six-eight time—a movement so animated that it might easily set a congregation to dancing out of the church. Haydn knew perfectly well that many of the devout were shocked by the lack of religious solemnity in these works, but he said, "I cannot write them otherwise. When I think of God my heart is so full of joy that the notes gush forth as from a fountain. Since God has given me a joyful heart, he will forgive me for having served Him joyfully."

## VII

As the years slipped quietly by at Esterhaz, Haydn's fame slowly spread. Publishers in Germany, France, England, and the Netherlands sought his works, and often pirated them when they could not obtain them honourably. Kings, queens, and archdukes gave the composer their praise and patronage; other noble persons who visited the palace left him snuff-boxes, rings, and gold pieces as mementos of their favour. But Haydn, genial, modest, and unaffected, went

about his work year after year with methodical regularity. He seldom varied his daily routine—to rise with the dawn, dress himself carefully, and then sit down to his task of writing music. Every evening he appeared before his Kapelle, dapper and immaculate, in the pale blue and silver livery of the Prince. He was far from being a handsome man. His body was too heavy for his short, spindly legs; his face was large, and marred by a jutting lower jaw with teeth that protruded through the lips; his nose was prominent, and made ugly by a polypus; pockmarks covered his face.

Haydn's life was a lonely one, because there was not much entertainment for those at Esterhaz whose business it was to entertain. For relaxation he loved to hunt and fish in the forests and marshes that surrounded the palace; otherwise he could find little to do but work. Each year he longed for the few winter months when he could return to Vienna and enjoy the convivial life, the excellent food, and the companionships which were denied him in the servants' quarters at Esterhaz.

Haydn's admiration for beautiful women led him into one particularly incongruous romance. In 1779 a young singer named Luigia Polzelli and her husband, a violinist, were engaged at Esterhaz. They stayed for a year and a half, during which time Haydn, then forty-seven, fell in love with Luigia, who was nineteen. One tie of sympathy between them was the fact that each was married to an uncongenial spouse; another, in the case of the lady, was undoubtedly the sums of money which Haydn regularly sent her on request for a number of years after she left the palace. When ten years had elapsed the husband, with seeming co-operation, died; and Haydn was moved to remark in his letter of condolence to the widow: "Perhaps that moment may yet arrive which we have so often desired, when two pairs of eyes will be closed. Here is one pair shut! But what of the other? May it be as God wills!" The second pair were slow in shutting. Eleven more years went by before Anna Maria Haydn finally died, and by that time the composer was sixty-eight. Luigia then got him to sign a legal document in which he promised to marry her, in case he should consider marrying again, and to leave her an annual income on his death. The first part of the promise was soon revoked by Luigia herself, when she married an Italian singer; the second part was faithfully carried out, with Haydn's characteristic lack of resentment, when he bequeathed her an annuity in his will.

One of the happiest associations in Haydn's life was the friendship which grew up between him and Mozart. The occasion of their first meeting is not known; but it was some time in 1781 or '82, during one of Haydn's winter visits to Vienna. Mozart was twenty-five, Haydn close to fifty. The younger man was travelled and experienced far beyond his years; from childhood he had known public adulation. He was witty, charming, ebullient, though at intervals morbidly despondent—and he was divinely gifted in music. Haydn was drawn to him instantly in spite of the disparity in their years, lives, and natures; the bond of affection between them was based on sincere admiration. Mozart said that Haydn was "the first man who taught me how to write quartets"; and Haydn told Mozart's father, "I declare to God, as a man of honour, that your son is the greatest composer of whom I have ever heard." Throughout the remainder of their lives the work of each was profoundly influenced by the other. It was not a rivalry in any sense, but a mutual stimulation that spurred them to do their best work. Both seemed to speak the same musical language, yet neither dominated the other or intruded upon his individuality.

## VIII

In the year 1790 the magnificent and beloved Prince Nicolaus died; and his heir, having no taste for music, dismissed the Kapelle. For the first time in twenty-eight years Haydn had no post. He went back to Vienna and settled himself down with the idea of spending the rest of his days in leisurely enjoyment of the charming city and his friends. Hardly had he arrived when a man came to see him, saying, "I am Salomon, of London. I have come to fetch you." To the astonished composer the man proposed a trip to London for a series of concerts. Haydn was to compose an opera, for which he would be paid three hundred pounds; for six new symphonies he was to get five hundred pounds, and for some twenty other compositions, two hundred pounds. He was guaranteed a further two hundred pounds from a benefit concert.

The composer, bewildered by the boldness of the scheme, at first had his qualms. It was in fact a big undertaking for a man close to sixty who had never been outside his native country and who knew nothing of foreign languages. But Salomon was not to be talked down. This remarkable man was the fore-runner of the modern impresario. He had been an accomplished violinist, quartet player, and Kapellmeister before he established a reputation in London as an organizer of subscription concerts. He was that rare combination of cultured musician and able financial manager. When he heard of the death of Prince Nicolaus he sped to Vienna, for he knew the magic in the name of Joseph Haydn; and above all he knew the peculiarly fortuitous circumstances that presented themselves in London at that time.

To Haydn, coming from the continent in the 1790s London was vast, noisy, dirty, and uncomfortable; full of bustling tradesmen, and with few outward attractions for a man of the arts. Money seemed plentiful, but everything was expensive. The city typified the country in general, which was producing no important native music of its own; yet there was an urgent demand for music of every kind, especially the best. Fifty years before, Handel had become a national hero by supplying London with magnificent operas and oratorios. Twice he had gone bankrupt doing it, but he ended up in Westminster Abbey. Salomon knew that the time was ripe for the appearance of another great musical personality.

Haydn arrived in London on New Year's Day, 1791, and was accorded not merely a triumph but a whole series of triumphs. Musical associations fell over one another trying to honour him by playing his works and giving him medals; ambassadors and other noble persons called on him in droves; he was invited to St. James's Palace and received by the Prince of Wales, afterwards George IV. ("He is the handsomest man on God's earth," wrote Haydn. "He has an extraordinary love for music and a great deal of feeling, but very little money.") Invitations to dinners and banquets poured in upon him until he had no time to compose or to rest, and he had to limit his acceptances to persons of title.

The first of Salomon's concerts took place in March. It was a splendid success, with the composer, who presided at the harpsichord, receiving ovation after ovation. His symphony was so well received that the slow movement was encored—a pleasing surprise to Haydn, because, "fresh from the dinner-table,

the audience generally fell asleep during the slow movements". The subsequent concerts of the series enjoyed similar success, and all through the rest of the year the public enthusiasm for Haydn showed no signs of abating. He went to Oxford and received a degree, after which he recorded in his diary, "I had to pay one and a half guineas for the bell peals at Oxforth [*sic*] when I received the doctor's degree, and half a guinea for the gown." He was a guest at a gargantuan public banquet and ball given by the Lord Mayor of London and attended by twelve hundred persons; but the composer was bewildered and oppressed by the uproar, the continual shouting of toasts, the intense heat and the bad music for the dancing. Besides various members of the Royal Family, and the nobility, he met many other celebrities of the time, including Sir Joshua Reynolds; Bartolozzi, the famous engraver; Herschel, the great astronomer; innumerable musicians, and various hostesses noted for their dinners and salons. The beautiful ladies especially enchanted him. There was a certain Mrs. Schroeter who fell desperately in love with him, and in the early months of 1792 an affair developed between them. Haydn said later, "She was lovely and amiable, and I should in all likelihood have married her if I had been single."

During all this activity Haydn was obliged to find time to compose the various works which he had pledged to Salomon. Meanwhile, a rival management brought to London Ignaz Pleyel, a young and inconsequential composer and former pupil of Haydn's, and set him up as a counter-attraction. All through the spring of 1792 the rival concerts contended for the public favour. It was all in the spirit of clean sport; both composers paid courteous visits to each other's concerts. But Haydn had to work like a galley slave to complete his music. "My eyes have suffered," he wrote, "and I have written many a time all through the night. . . . I am tired out, exhausted with so much toil, and I long for rest with all my heart."

In June 1792 he was at last able to start for home, worn out by the activity of a decade crowded into a year and a half. He returned to Vienna, bought a house with some of his London profits, and settled down to rest. He was saddened by the loss of his friend Mozart, who had died during his absence; but just at this time another young genius of music came into his life when the twenty-one-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven became his pupil. Unfortunately, there was no repetition of the Mozart association. Haydn was an indifferent teacher; and Beethoven, impatient and headstrong, his imagination already filled with grandiose ideas, considered the older man stodgy and behind the times. The lessons did not last long. After a period of rest, Haydn again listened to the persuasive voice of Salomon, who wanted another series of London concerts and six more symphonies. So, early in 1794, the composer arrived in London for a second visit of eighteen months.

The triumphs of the first visit were repeated; except that the frenzied excitement had calmed down somewhat, and Haydn was able to conserve his strength and enjoy a more reasonable regimen of work and entertainment. The twelve Salomon concerts were again tremendously successful, and so were the six new symphonies. The composer was officially invited to make a permanent home in England. The ultimate honour descended upon him when he was presented to King George III, at a concert at York House. The King remarked, "You have written a great deal, Dr. Haydn." "Yes, sire," the composer replied, "more than is good for me." The visit came to an end in August 1795, when

Haydn returned to Vienna with another twelve hundred pounds, a further assurance that he could end his days in peace and security. He also brought home with him the usual collection of odd gifts which the public (for reasons not entirely clear) insist upon sending to celebrities—whether musicians, statesmen, or six-day bicycle riders. Among Haydn's specimens were a valuable talking parrot and half a dozen pairs of stockings embroidered with the notes of some of his best-known musical themes.

## IX

The most astonishing thing of all about Haydn's two London visits is the fact that, in spite of the quantity of music he had to produce and the strenuous conditions under which he had to produce it, his work during this period is the finest of his entire career. The twelve Salomon symphonies continue to this day to be the most representative and the most frequently performed of all his instrumental works. Most popular are the "Clock" Symphony, the "Surprise" Symphony, the "Military" Symphony, and the Symphony "With the Drum Roll"; but every one of the twelve is exemplary of Haydn's genius at its summit, larger in scope than anything he had done before, overflowing with his best melodies, controlled and shaped at every point by his maturest technical mastery.

Haydn wrote about a hundred symphonies (a hundred and four is the exact figure set by expert Haydn editors). Of these only about twenty are played with any degree of frequency today. Many of the rest are never played at all, for the reason that they have never been published. They lie in European archives and in the hands of private individuals. They have been slow in reaching modern performance because they often require the most careful editing by musicologists, to correct mistakes caused by the haphazard publishing methods of the eighteenth century, and in many cases to establish their authenticity. (There are at least eighty symphonies which have been attributed to Haydn but which modern editors reject as the work of other men.) Thus we actually know today only a fraction of Haydn's immense volume of orchestral work. It may seem that we are therefore judging him on the basis of very incomplete data, and that knowledge of what lies hidden in the unpublished works might alter completely our estimates of him as a composer. This is unlikely. As the unknown works have gradually appeared in publication they have invariably substantiated rather than challenged the views long held about Haydn—about his craftsmanship, his remarkable inventive powers, his genius for finding new ways of performing his routine tasks, his steady growth as an artist. Valuable as they are, none of these earlier symphonies has so far surpassed any of the famous last group of Salomon symphonies as Haydn's instrumental masterpieces, and it does not seem possible that any will.

Haydn was thus one of those artists whose genius ripens slowly, for the Salomon symphonies were written after he had reached the age of fifty-eight. And after them he was to crown his life's work with his two oratorios, "The Creation" and "The Seasons", both written when he was in his late sixties. These, however, were composed under great difficulty; the spirit of the old man was willing and eager, but the flesh was weak. After the completion of "The Seasons" in 1801, Haydn was exhausted and finished. The few remaining years of his life were spent in Vienna, his strength gradually declining, his mind dimming; but full of honours and at peace.

The French biographer, Michel Brenet, gives an affecting portrait of Haydn in his last years. "Strangers admitted to greet him found him seated in a big armchair, carefully dressed in the old style, in an embroidered vest and a coat of fine brown cloth, with breeches of black silk, white stockings, buckled shoes, a frilled shirt, a white cravat, and a long wig curled, powdered, and reaching to within an inch of his eyebrows; on his finger, the ring from the King of Prussia; and near him, on a table, his hat, stick and gloves. . . . When he was in a good mood, he would get his secretary or valet to bring in the relics of his career which he took pleasure in displaying to his visitors. . . . He grew animated when talking, ransacked his memories, and delighted to tell the innocuous jests of his youth. . . . At other times, his natural gaiety suddenly abandoned him; he grieved over the uselessness of old age, and over the loss of his memory; sometimes he wept."

In May 1809 the French army under Napoleon captured Vienna. Haydn was shocked and depressed by his country's downfall; he was startled further one day by the appearance at his house of a French officer. This man sat at his piano and played one of the airs from "The Creation", so Haydn embraced him. A few weeks later the composer died in his sleep.

There was a postlude—both curious and macabre—the details of which were recently recorded by Olin Downes in the *New York Times*. Haydn was buried in a churchyard in Vienna, but in 1820 his remains were exhumed by Prince Esterhazy so that they could be transferred to a church in Eisenstadt. It was discovered that the skull was missing. Two days after Haydn's funeral two Viennese officials had secretly opened the grave and carried off the composer's head, their purpose being to study the theories of Dr. Gall, the founder of phrenology. When their act was discovered they confessed and promised to return the skull to Prince Esterhazy. Instead, one of them sent him a skull from another body. This second deception was not revealed until the other thieving official died and bequeathed the true skull to the museum of the Viennese Friends of Music. There it remained for years on display with other Haydn relics, despite the bitter demands and lawsuits of the Esterhazy family, who had built a magnificent mausoleum for the composer's remains but refused to inter them without the correct skull. Thus the matter rested for many years, until after World War I when Austria and Hungary were split apart and the Esterhazy family, staunch Hungarians, left Eisenstadt, which was now part of Austria, and in disgust removed themselves and their possessions to Budapest. Finally, in 1938, after the German conquest of Austria the friendship of Hungary became a matter of prime importance to the Nazi government. By official act the skull was taken from the Viennese Friends of Music and given to Prince Esterhazy, thus bringing the head and body of Haydn together again at last.



# Mozart

1756-91



THE WORD "PRODIGY" IS ALTOGETHER INADEQUATE TO DESCRIBE THE CHILDHOOD genius of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. At the age of three he began to pick out chords on a clavier. At four he received his first music lessons, and at five he began to compose. He wrote violin sonatas at the age of seven, and his first symphonies at eight. By that time he was famous in half a dozen European capitals for his astonishing virtuosity on the clavier, violin, and organ. He could play the most difficult music at sight; he could improvise for half an hour on a given theme; and he could write out perfectly music that he had heard played but once. Some aspects of his genius are remindful of those juvenile wizards who defeat a score of their elders at simultaneous games of chess, or of young men who perform mental mathematical computations of astronomical size; except that Mozart's skill went beyond even those miracles. Such mental feats are essentially static and sterile; while Mozart, before he had reached the age of ten, had transmuted his talents into incredibly profuse powers of creation.

Mozart paid a heavy price for his gifts, for his personal life after his fabulous childhood was a tragic failure. He died at the age of thirty-five, leaving behind him a body of work staggering in size and of a quality that placed him next to Bach and Beethoven. Had he lived another twenty-five years there is no imagining the channels into which he might have turned the course of music's stream.

Mozart owed an immense debt, both for good and evil, to his father. Leopold Mozart was a violinist, composer, and teacher of unusual ability. He had studied theology, logic, and law at the University of Salzburg in southern Austria; but his natural interest led him to music, and he eventually became Vice-Kapellmeister and Court composer to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. He married Anna Pertl, a native of that town. She was an unusually pretty girl, with none of Leopold's mental attainments, but good-natured and full of gaiety. It was from her that her illustrious son inherited several of his most conspicuous traits—his high spirits and his love of nonsensical fun. The latter trait broke out in his letters, which are spattered with obscenity so coarse that his shocked biographers, all through the pious nineteenth century, were kept busy at the process of bowdlerizing, excising, and generally dry-cleaning his correspondence. Leopold had little humour; he was an austere, sarcastic man, shrewd and calculating. He knew music thoroughly; and in 1756, the year of Wolfgang's birth in Salzburg, he published a book on violin-playing which

became known all over Europe and which remained a standard method for more than half a century.

Leopold first discovered extraordinary talent in his daughter Maria Anna (called "Nannerl"), who was five years older than Wolfgang. It was while the father was giving music lessons to the daughter that Wolfgang, a mere baby, began to take noticeable delight in the sounds of music. When he was four the father began to teach him too. Within a year he was trying to compose little minuets; and then at last the father realized the extent of the stewardship that had been placed in his hands. The rest of Wolfgang's boyhood was devoted to one thing—music—to the systematic, rigidly enforced training of the greatest artistic talent the world has ever witnessed in a child. Leopold sacrificed the rest of his life and his own career to the task. For twenty years the precious son was hardly ever out of his sight.

In 1762, when Nannerl was eleven and Wolfgang six, the father took them to Munich to play before the Elector of Bavaria, Maximilian Joseph III. Later they went to Vienna, where the youngsters performed for the Empress Maria Theresa and her family. On this occasion the affectionate little Wolfgang jumped up on the Empress's lap, put his arms around her neck, and kissed her. The Empress was genuinely touched; she had borne sixteen children herself. After that the Mozart children played repeatedly for the Royal Family, and they even became familiar with the Empress's children. Once Wolfgang slipped and fell on a polished floor in the palace and one of Maria Theresa's daughters, who was but two months older than he, helped him to his feet. Wolfgang thanked her and said, "When I grow up I shall marry you." The little archduchess was later married, not to a common musician but to a dauphin, with whom she met an infamous death. Her name was Marie Antoinette.

After the success of Vienna the four members of the Mozart family embarked on a tour which lasted more than three years—through southern Germany and the Rhineland to the Netherlands, France, England, and Switzerland. Everywhere the children were a sensation. They gave a concert in Frankfort for which Leopold Mozart wrote a public notice advertising their wares: "The little girl, who is in her twelfth year, will play the most difficult compositions of the greatest masters; the boy, who is not yet seven, will perform on the clavicin or harpsichord; he will also play a concerto for the violin, and will accompany symphonies on the clavier, the manual or keyboard being covered with a cloth, with as much facility as if he could see the keys; he will instantly name all notes played at a distance, whether singly or in chords, on the clavier, or any other instrument, glass bell, or clock. He will finally, both on the harpsichord and the organ, improvise as long as may be desired and in any key. . . ." It happened that that Frankfort concert impressed itself with vividness upon the mind of a dreamy-eyed boy of sixteen, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was present with his father. Sixty-seven years later the decaying old poet-philosopher remarked to Eckermann, his Boswell, "I still remember quite clearly the little fellow with his wig and sword."

They went on to Paris, where they presently received the call for which Leopold had been praying—to that arch flowering of beauty and luxury, poised on a thin crust over a rotting social order—Versailles. Leopold was a prodigious letter-writer (a habit which his son inherited), and he left a detailed picture of that incredible scene, especially New Year's Day 1764, when Louis XV and the Royal Family dined in state, with a large gathering of distinguished persons watching them. The Mozarts stood in the crowd when the Royal Family entered, and "as

they passed us they spoke to our Wolfgang and we then followed them to the table. . . . My Wolfgang was graciously privileged to stand beside the Queen the whole time, to talk constantly to her, entertain her and kiss her hands repeatedly, besides partaking of the dishes which she handed him from the table."

Though the Queen treated him with the same kindness that she would a pet spaniel, Wolfgang was less fortunate with Madame la Marquise de Pompadour. When he played for her in her apartments, which were "like a paradise, looking out upon the gardens", she stood him upon a small table that she might talk to him and look him over. He bent forward to kiss her, but she turned away from him coldly. "Who is this who does not want to kiss me?" he cried. "My Empress kissed me!"

In the spring of 1764 the Mozarts went on to London, where they remained for more than a year, appearing a number of times before the young King George III and Queen Charlotte. The royal couple were charmingly courteous, but Leopold was disappointed by the fee. It was only twenty-four guineas for each appearance, but at least it was paid immediately on their leaving the King's apartment. The Mozart children gave public concerts, too, for which Leopold hired an orchestra. The music played was all composed by Wolfgang, and it included his first few symphonies, one of which he wrote in a house in Chelsea. After London, they went on a tour through Holland, then back to Paris, to Switzerland (where they just missed meeting Voltaire), and finally by way of Munich back to Salzburg.

## II

From certain aspects the grand tour had been a triumph, not only for Wolfgang but for Leopold. It is impossible not to admire the courage and resourcefulness with which the father faced the task of transporting a family of four around eighteenth-century Europe, and the adroitness with which he won the attention of the people whose attention meant most. He had a knack for getting introductions to the nobility, to high churchmen, ambassadors, and even to royalty. That was all part of the game of patronage, and Leopold played it for all it was worth. He had to, because the public concert, a fairly modern invention, was just beginning to exist.

Even if the childhood tours of Wolfgang Mozart were not important in music history for the effect they had on the artist's maturity, they would still be noteworthy as a record of the workings of the patronage system. Leopold's letters bring to light facts long forgotten about that system, which made lackeys and panderers of serious musicians. In Mozart's time it was on its way out; another generation and it would be swept away, along with other eighteenth-century social, economic, and political refuse. But Mozart came in for some of the worst of it. Thousands of musicians in his day had no economic security whatever, for the reason that they had no way of reaching a large enough public. Lacking public concerts and royalty systems, they became the parasites of the Church and the aristocracy. A few of them like Haydn fell into comfortable berths; but for the great majority life was a struggle even more degrading than that of young Samuel Johnson, trying to get a foothold in literary London. Many of them travelled round Europe in their efforts to keep alive, and they were treated not much better than gypsies.

When Leopold Mozart brought his children to play in some great house or palace he never knew exactly what the fee would be, whether money or a gift of

some sort. If it turned out to be money (for which he always secretly prayed), the sum might be generous or miserly, depending on the whim of the giver; and often he and his family had to wait around in some obscure town for several weeks while a slow-paying prince or archbishop finally got around to settling up. The gifts which they collected were remarkable, both for their value and their absurdity. There were rings, watches, coats, cloaks, laces, ribbons, armlets, and fichus; there were gold and silver boxes, and travelling writing-cases, and there were snuff-boxes by the score. Wolfgang got several swords, and Nannerl received "an uncommonly beautiful, heavy toothpick case of solid gold". As a result of this absurd custom Leopold had a hard time making expenses, even when the catch of gulden or louis d'or was good. Travelling expenses were often enormous, and wherever they went they had to keep up appearances.

Even worse than the moral effects of these years of polite barnstorming were the physical effects on a frail child like Wolfgang. In the eighteenth century a traveller in Europe had to contend with roads that were wretched, inns that were foul, food that was better left uneaten. One of Leopold's letters from Italy mentions the "preserved veal accompanied by a most fearful stinking smell", and wine that could not be drunk because it was a laxative. Wherever they went they were haunted by the fear of epidemics, especially of smallpox. In Holland, Nannerl became ill and was at the point of death for days. Then Wolfgang got the same fever, "an illness," wrote the father, "which in four weeks has made him so wretched that he is not only absolutely unrecognizable, but has nothing left but his tender skin on his little bones".

The modern parent who is conscious of a child's need for proper diet, hygienic surroundings, and above all regular periods of mental and physical rest, can only read of the ten most formative years of Wolfgang Mozart's childhood with mingled feelings of pity for the child and contempt for his father. Along with superb musical tutelage, the father gave the son a frail, spindly, and probably rachitic body, a nervous system that soon broke down under the shock and strain of life, and in some respects a character whose weaknesses were to hasten his death.

### III

Shortly after the three-year tour, when Wolfgang had hardly recovered from a severe case of smallpox, his father had him writing an opera, a little work called *La Finta Semplice*. Leopold could not pull enough wires to get it produced in Vienna, but he did get a commission for a second opera from the famous and wealthy Dr. Anton Mesmer, whose mesmerism later became the fashionable quackery of the day. *Bastien und Bastienne* was privately produced at the doctor's house, and in some ways is an astonishing work. Naturally its operatic conceptions are infantile; it is hardly more than a small packet of the most obvious musical clichés. Even so it shows the mental discipline of which Wolfgang was already capable as a child of twelve—a sustained effort easily comparable with the writing of a short novel.

The next year, when Wolfgang was approaching fourteen, the father and son set out for Italy—the last and by far the most formidable citadel of the music world which was left for the boy to conquer. At Rome young Mozart performed one of his most celebrated feats. During Holy Week he heard a performance in the Sistine Chapel of the famous "Miserere" by Allegri, a work which the papal choir guarded jealously, permitting no copies to be made. After

a single hearing Wolfgang went back to his lodgings and wrote out the whole score from memory. At Bologna he was elected a member of the Accademia Philharmonica, after he had finished in half an hour a test in contrapuntal writing which often took the most learned musicians more than three hours. In Milan he completed an opera, *Mitridate, Re di Ponto*, which was performed under his direction a few weeks before his fifteenth birthday. It was such a success that it received twenty performances.

During the next four years, in the course of three separate visits, young Mozart was received at the great houses and villas of Italy's aristocracy, the proudest in Europe; he was present at the country's most resplendent operatic performances; he met a number of the most famous musicians of the time, including Piccinni, who was Gluck's operatic rival; he was decorated by the Pope. He met many noted castrati, and also the great Padre Martini, whose reputation as a teacher, music theorist, and historian was world-wide. Martini gave young Mozart lessons and corrected his exercises in counterpoint. The effect on the young man of these associations, and of the whole musical scene of Italy, was nothing less than profound. At his most impressionable age he was steeped in Italian music, the finest elements of whose style, idiom, and essential beauty were later to reappear, distilled through his own Teutonic genius, in the creations of his maturity.

Very little of the work which Mozart produced during his childhood and early manhood is performed today. Not much of it would have survived at all had he not later become a very great musician. Most of it is the standard stuff of his time, often imitative of the particular composer whose work he happened to be studying. The thing that is still astonishing, however, is its bulk—proof of the speed with which his otherwise immature mind had seized the mechanics of this complex art. Part of his facility came from extraordinary powers of concentration, the rest from a habit of work rigorously imposed on him by his father. His boyhood letters reveal that often he wrote until his fingers were sore and his head ached; and during his Italian visits he seemed always to be wanting sleep.

At the age of twenty-one young Mozart had not only composed a vast flood of music—operas, symphonies, string quartets, church music, concertos, and piano works—but he was a virtuoso on three instruments. No musician of his time could match his record or his potentialities. What he needed now was an appointment to some court, where he would be relieved of the business of making a living—just such a post as Haydn enjoyed at Esterhaz. No one realized this more clearly than Leopold. All through the son's childhood the father's correspondence is peppered with his apprehensions of Wolfgang's future, after the boy could no longer cash in on his youth. As it turned out, the father's fears were completely justified. The appointment never arrived. Mozart's talents brought him little money and no security. His personal life descended into disorder, and finally into desperate poverty. The father stood by helplessly through it all, but was spared by his own death from witnessing the final degradation. Utterly inexplicable is the fact that the music, the fruit of those brief and hectic years, is one of the richest testaments of beauty in existence. It is completely unstained by the misfortunes of the man who created it.

#### IV

Leopold Mozart's own appointment as composer to the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg had been something of a sinecure. He was permitted to leave his

post for long periods of time during the various tours. But in 1777, when Wolfgang was twenty-one years old, a new Archbishop decided that he was not getting his money's worth from the Mozarts. When Leopold asked permission to leave for another tour (and secretly to search for an appointment for his son) the Archbishop refused point-blank to let the father go. This left Leopold in a dilemma; although Wolfgang was of age, his father did not trust him to make his way alone in the world. He finally decided that the young man's mother should accompany him on the tour. The day they left Salzburg, Leopold lay on his bed for hours, a soul-stricken man. The fabulous son who had hardly been out of his sight for a day, and whose triumphs he had always shared, had now left him for two years; and although he did not know it, he was never to see his wife again.

The young man and his mother had got no farther than the town of Mannheim when they met up with trouble—in the person of an indigent musician named Weber. This man had a wife who was shift, unscrupulous, and addicted to drink; and he had four young daughters. One of them, the seventeen-year-old Aloysia, had a lovely soprano voice. Wolfgang fell madly in love with her and began making extravagant plans for transporting the entire family to Italy, where fame and fortune would await Aloysia. When Leopold heard of this he nearly died of disappointment and exasperation. He crushed his son's notions under a volley of angry letters, warning him of the end of a genius who did not keep his head—"captured by some petticoat, bedded on straw, and penned-in with an attic-full of starving children. . . . Off with you to Paris, and that soon! Find your place among great people. *Aut Caesar aut nihil.*"

Young Mozart gave in, and he and his mother went on to Paris. There another disappointment awaited him. At that time the music public of the city was diverted by the Gluck-Piccinni feud, in which the champions of the two operatic composers were engaging each other with all the acrimony, heat, furore, and buffoonery of a political campaign. No one had much interest in Mozart. Instead of the darling boy of eight in his satin coat and powdered wig and sword, performing his effortless miracles, Paris now saw merely an undersized young man with a small body, spindly legs, an oversized head with a mass of fine-textured hair and grey lack-lustre eyes—and with nothing whatever in his appearance to advertise his genius. The only appointment offered him was that of organist at Versailles, but the pay was so small that he could not afford to accept it. In the midst of these discouragements his mother died. He was alone now for the first time in his life, far away from home and without friends, so he left Paris and turned back towards Salzburg.

It is fortunate that the voluminous correspondence which passed between Mozart and his father during this period is preserved, for it is an eye-filling revelation of the minds and characters of the two men. Young Mozart had undergone a profound change. As a child he had been studious and even solemn; but with manhood he became high-spirited, mercurial, impulsive. He loved fun and nonsense of all sorts, he wanted to dance and play billiards, and in congenial company he was generally the life of the party. Like the typical middle-class Salzburgers from whom he sprang, he thought nothing of expressing his ideas in terms of the coarsest functional humour. To a young lady cousin whom he called "Die Bäsle", he wrote the choicest of the obscenities which stunned his early biographers. /

Leopold was deeply disturbed by this change in his son's character. He realized that Wolfgang was utterly lacking in a sense of the practical, and that

he couldn't hold on to money. Leopold wrote him constantly, advising him, begging him to give heed; and often the irresponsible young man simply glossed over his father's agonized beseeching, or did not reply at all.

## V

After the failure of the Paris venture and the collapse of his hopes for marrying Aloysia, young Mozart returned to Salzburg; and to his father's immense relief settled down to a dreary job in the Archbishop's service. The next two years were torture. He hated the dull town of Salzburg. He loathed the Archbishop (Hieronymous von Colloredo), and the prelate disliked him. The only bright spot in Mozart's life at this time was the composition of the opera *Idomeneo*, when he was twenty-five. The work was written at the invitation of the Elector of Bavaria, for a carnival at Munich. It is Mozart's first opera of enduring quality. More than that, it is a work of seriousness and gravity; it has an emotional depth only hinted at in his music up to that time.

*Idomeneo* was composed under difficulties which would baffle any modern composer. The libretto was based on a turgid Greek tragedy, and it was supplied by Archbishop Hieronymous' chaplain, one Abbé Varesco, who knew as much about dramatic values as an eight-year-old acolyte would know of the canon law. The singer entrusted with the title role was sixty-six years old, several others in the cast were also on the shady side of their prime, and the male soprano had never before set foot on a stage. Mozart did what every composer in those days was expected to do; he accommodated his music to the singers, trying where he could to cover up their defects, and weakening his work as a result. *Idomeneo* is seldom heard today, although there have recently been two modernized versions, one by Richard Strauss and another by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari.

The immediate result of the first production of this opera, in 1781, was a final break between Mozart and the Archbishop. At a meeting of the two in Vienna the holy man forgot his dignity and called Mozart "scoundrel, knave, and scurvy fellow"; and later one of his courtiers kicked Mozart bodily out of his rooms. Hieronymous has been excoriated by Mozart's biographers for this episode and his failure to understand that he was dealing with a great genius instead of merely a trying young man with an inflated ego.

Mozart was terribly humiliated. He refused to return to Salzburg at all, but decided to remain in Vienna. Thus he removed himself at long last from the domination of his father. In Salzburg, Leopold had to cling to his own precarious post with the Archbishop, with only his spinster daughter Nannerl near him for comfort. Meanwhile, the Weber family, who had a fascination for young Mozart of nothing less than evil-eye intensity, were also living in Vienna, and it was not long before Wolfgang went to live with them. Presently gossip reached the ears of Leopold concerning his son and Constanze, the eighteen-year-old sister of Aloysia. The true story of this romance remains obscure, but the prime mover was undoubtedly the girl's mother. Her schemes succeeded in August 1782, when Wolfgang and her daughter were married.

The story of the marriage is a pitiful one. There is no avoiding the conclusion that it was a source of great misfortune to Mozart, contributing in large measure to his death nine years later. The poor girl was far too weak, both in character and physical stamina, to act as the prop which Mozart's own unstable nature so badly needed. She was coquettish, feather-headed, and helpless, hardly more

than a child, with no more sense than her husband of how to order their home, their finances, or their lives. From house to house they moved as their fortunes rose or fell. In nine years Constanze bore six children, but only two survived infancy.

## VI

The steadily mounting flame of Mozart's musical genius had flared up brilliantly with *Idomeneo*; it blazed anew with another opera produced at the time of his marriage to Constanze—*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Elopement from the Harem*). This work owed its existence to the fact that the National Theatre in Vienna, under the ægis of Emperor Joseph II, wanted to cultivate a truly German type of opera, in competition with the foreign works which then filled its repertoire. The libretto of *Die Entführung* was therefore in German, and the piece was an admitted attempt to translate the popular Italian opera buffa form into a thoroughly Germanic work. The Turkish setting of the story was chosen merely to cash in on the public's interest in the Orient—its colour, romance, and mystery, and particularly the intriguing matter of its harems. Mozart tintured his music lightly with what then passed for the "Turkish style", a style which he had used so charmingly in the last movement of his Piano Sonata in A major (K. 331).

When *Die Entführung* was first performed in Vienna, in July 1782, it was an immediate success, and Mozart personally received much acclaim—although very little money. The piece is often called the first real German opera, and there is no doubt that it provided the roots for the great tree of German operetta which flourishes to this day. It is also the first work of Mozart's in which he begins to reveal his incomparable gift for operatic comedy.

Another Mozart work of the same vintage as *Die Entführung* is the "Haffner" Symphony, in D major (K. 385). Haffner was a wealthy merchant of Salzburg, for whom Mozart had previously written a charming serenade (in the same key) to celebrate the marriage of a daughter. Now this family requested a whole symphony. Mozart demurred when his father first wrote him of the commission, for he was busy arranging *Die Entführung* for wind instruments—a hack job but a difficult one. ("If I do 't," he wrote, "someone else will anticipate me and secure the profits.") Nevertheless he undertook the symphony and turned it out in two weeks. It remains today one of the masterpieces of Mozart's instrumental work, and it would be an astute critic who could find the slightest sign of haste in its exquisite workmanship. Mozart himself made an interesting and revealing comment upon it. Six months after he composed it his father returned the manuscript to him, and he wrote in reply, "My new 'Haffner' Symphony has positively amazed me, for I had forgotten every single note of it. It must surely produce a good effect."

To those who expect that all first-rate creative endeavour should be the result of a divine afflatus, prayerfully invoked, this detachment of Mozart's from his work may sound like shocking carelessness. It should be pointed out that the musicians of his time nearly all worked as he did. They wrote most of their music on commission or as part of a particular job, the way Haydn ground out his innumerable works for Prince Esterhazy. Often it had to be created under pressure and at great speed, the way Handel, working to catch the winds of popular favour in London, would turn out a whole opera in a few weeks. Very



seldom did they compose with an ear to the possible critical comments of posterity.

It was Beethoven who, in elevating the dignity of the musician as artist, made him acutely conscious of the future. In his symphonies, for example, Beethoven composed as if each work had to have a separate entity; he tried to endow it with a special emotion and purpose, often expending upon it months of labour and years of thought. That is why he was able to write only nine symphonies; whereas Haydn, with whom the form had no such heroic implications, could turn out more than a hundred, sometimes half a dozen at a time.

It is all too easy for present-day listeners, knowing these facts, to become impatient with eighteenth-century composers. Appreciation of their classicism has been dulled by our continual contact with Beethoven and the nineteenth-century romanticists—highly surcharged emotionalists who strove continually in their art for the grand line and the lofty message. Beside their work the music of the earlier classicists often seems pale. It is true that the simplification which was the soul of the homophonic movement in music often declined into simple dullness, true that even masters like Mozart and Haydn sometimes fell back in their haste upon formulas—upon countless repetitions, obvious padding, unadventurous harmonic schemes, and recurring scale passages. ("Scale passages especially annoy me," wrote Herbert Spencer, "suggesting that the composer, 'gravelled for lack of matter', runs upstairs to find an idea, and being disappointed comes down again.") To study the music of Mozart is to realize that in his greatest works he succeeded, not failed, by his masterful use of just such hackneyed devices as these. He could take the most unpromising of them and, seemingly without effort, flood them with such a wealth of beautiful melody that no age could ever find them dry. His sense of form was so unerring that even when his melodic invention seemed to falter he could still beguile by the purity and balance of his architecture, the exquisite nicety with which his ideas fitted into the preconceived mould.

Above everything else the present age should be reminded of the human emotion which coloured every bar that the mature Mozart wrote. One reason why so much space has been devoted here to the background of this composer's life is to make plain what an emotional man he was. He was the exact opposite of the methodical, emotionally stable Haydn. Considering the age in which he worked and the way personal feeling was ruled out of its musical forms, an astonishing amount of this composer's heart got into his music. The personal is blended with the abstract not alone in his wonderfully human comic operas, but in his patrician Masses, and even in some of his symphonies, concertos, and chamber works. He was far from being merely the marble-surfaced classicist which too many in this age still regard him.

## VII

Shortly after his marriage Mozart began work on the famous set of six string quartets which he published three years later with a dedication to Haydn. These were by no means the first of his works in this form. His earliest string quartet had been composed when he was fourteen years old, during one of the Italian journeys. This was followed by a number of other juvenile efforts, and then he dropped the form for almost ten years. Some time during the winter of 1781-82 occurred his first meeting with Haydn, in Vienna, and the beginning of

their friendship. Haydn had just brought out his group of Russian Quartets. He too had hardly touched the form for ten years, and these new works were a fresh approach, more carefully wrought than any he had done before. Like a flint striking fire, Mozart's imagination was set off by the master of Esterhaz. For the next few years he studied the older man's work assiduously.

In many respects the string quartet is the most difficult of all musical media, both for the composer and the listener. The very size of the playing group—a pair of violins, a viola, and a 'cello—indicates at once the process of reduction, of distillation, with which the composer is faced. From every side the pitfalls of monotony ring him in: the four weak-voiced instruments collectively cannot approach the dynamic scope of even a single piano, and the range of their tonal colouring is even more limited. The symphonic orchestra, by contrast, has a way of hiding structural and even melodic defects; it can beguile the ear by the sheer opulence of its tone colouring. Not so the string quartet. Composing for it resembles the writing of a sonnet, in which the poet must declaim his ideas, however lofty, within the confines of a handful of lines. Every phrase, every word must be weighed with precision instruments, and then fitted into the whole pattern so that no joint exists to hamper the flow of thought. In the same way, every note uttered by the four instruments of a string quartet must be alive and glowing with beauty. There can be no padding. The composer's ideas are exposed without mercy; his workmanship is viewed through a glass and at close range. It is understandable, therefore, that even so skilled a master as Haydn was close to fifty before he began to write the quartets which represent this side of his art at its best; and that Beethoven's great quartets were written in the closing years of his life. Even among music lovers in general, the string quartet is likely to be the companion of a contemplative maturity.

It was one of Mozart's major triumphs that he could turn out, before he was thirty years old, six of the finest examples of the form in existence. Even though as an individual he was as coarse as a young peasant, Mozart was yet the most fastidious of all musicians, and the string quartet gave him a perfect mirror for the natural elegance and purity of his style. It also gave him an opportunity to exercise his mastery of polyphony. During his boyhood in Italy he had studied hard the science of counterpoint, until he had gained a remarkable facility in applying the old devices of fugue, canon, inversion, pedal point, etc. In general the homophonic style predominates in his string quartets; nevertheless Mozart constantly reverted to the contrast of polyphony. By this means he was able to give each of his four instruments an important voice in the general dialogue, thus realizing the old polyphonic ideal of several strands of melody, each with its special contours of beauty, all contributing to a unified melodic whole.

The finest of the six "Haydn" Quartets is probably the second, in D minor (K. 421). It is remarkable for several reasons. It is in a minor key, which Mozart usually avoided; it is suffused with an intense melancholy, a mood which was just beginning to find its way into the work of this man whose nature it was to seek the sunlight; and its poignant Andante movement indicates a crisis in his personal life. It was written during one of his most desperate hours—in the early morning of June 17, 1783, while Constanze was in the next room giving birth to their first child.

Mozart himself never surpassed his "Haydn" Quartets, although he produced several superb works in the form of quintets (the fifth instrument being a second viola). The most famous of these is the great Quintet in G minor (K. 516), which is another of the infrequent confessions by the composer of an

inner wellspring of black despair. Four of its five movements are expressions of gloom and heartbreak. Another great quintet is that in E flat major (K. 614), written in the spring of 1791, when death was awaiting him but a few months ahead.

### VIII

The concerto is another form upon which Mozart left unfading marks. It has been noted that the modern concerto, which brilliantly spotlights a single instrument against the background of a symphonic orchestra, grew out of the old concerto grosso, in which a small group of solo instruments carried on a melodic conversation between the bold discourses of a large body of strings. It was a natural evolution for the small group to be reduced to a single instrument—a piano, a violin, or a 'cello—on which a gifted performer might indulge in a display of his technical skill. And it is not surprising that Mozart, one of the greatest virtuosos who ever set fingers to a keyboard, should be the man who crystallized this modern conception of the concerto.

He wrote a long list of concertos for various instruments, including the piano, violin, clarinet, horn, and flute; but the richest are those for piano. Of these the best are a half-dozen that fall within the last ten years of his life. They were an indirect means of making money, at a time when he was usually hard up. Since he lacked an appointment, Mozart had but two sources of income—music lessons and subscription concerts. The former were drudgery for him, but for the latter he created some of his best-known piano sonatas and his magnificent piano concertos.

Subscription concerts were part of the patronage system. Occasionally they were open to the public; more often they were held in the private homes of socially prominent persons, with the composer himself soliciting the financial assistance of his wealthy friends. Mozart gave many of these concerts during the brilliant social seasons in Vienna, and he drew the cream of the nobility for his audiences. The programmes were nothing less than appalling—both for length and richness—often comprising two whole symphonies, a concerto, several arias by assisting vocal artists, a group of short piano pieces, and a session of improvising. Mozart was kept busy providing himself with new works for these concerts. This accounts for the fact that in his last ten years he wrote no less than seventeen piano concertos, sandwiched in, of course, between hundreds of other compositions.

In the face of such prodigious industry it might sound like insanity to say that Mozart was a procrastinator, but at times he was. Often he put off composition until the last moment; then in a burst of activity he would perform miracles of speed. In one respect his creative processes were unique. During moments of seeming idleness or even distraction he would block out whole movements in his mind, often completing them mentally down to the last note. Then at some future time he would sit down and put what he had composed on paper. On one occasion he composed a sonata for violin and piano (K. 454) for a concert with a noted lady violinist. He delayed so long that he had time to write out only her violin part; he performed the piano part from memory and without having written it down. The feat was discovered by Emperor Joseph II, who noticed from the audience that Mozart was playing from a blank piece of music paper.

What Mozart accomplished with the concerto as a form was hardly more

remarkable than what he avoided. By its very nature the concerto is an artificial work. The first requirement for a good one is simply good taste. Lacking that, it becomes the instrumental equivalent of many an old Italian operatic aria—a scaffold from which musical gymnasts may perform high dives. Concertos in general did not degenerate to this stage until the middle of the nineteenth century, when Franz Liszt took the form in hand and showed what could be done when an emotional windstorm met up with a landslide of technique. In recent years composers have returned to a more prudent handling of the concerto; but if it is still in faint disrepute no one can say that Mozart, the man who shaped its beginnings, failed to provide ideal models. His concertos would naturally be elegant and in good taste; but more than that he gave them dignity of design by building them on the solid framework of the symphonic form—with the first movement in the sonata form, a slower second movement in the style of a contemplative aria, and a fleet closing movement in the rondo, sonata, or variation form. Moreover, his orchestra does not merely accompany; it carries on jointly with the solo instrument the burden of real symphonic development.

Not all the Mozart piano concertos are first-rate Mozart. In some of them he did a certain amount of padding (no doubt he had to, being so often pressed for time); and there are plenty of the scale passages which annoyed Spencer. But the best of them, especially the E flat major (K. 482), and the D minor (K. 466), must be included in any gallery of the finest music produced in the late eighteenth century. These pieces are far more difficult than they appear on the page or sound to the ear. This accounts for the fact that too many pianists reel them off like an endless musical belt, with no conception of the subtleties of style and execution which music of that age requires. As a result, both their own reputations and Mozart's suffer.

## IX

In Mozart's time the Italians still regarded the opera as their exclusive property, even though they had spread its vogue all over Europe. Musicologists generally agree that opera began in Florence, about the year 1600, when a small group of scholars and amateur musicians tried to recreate the ancient Greek mode of presenting tragic dramas—that is, speech with musical accompaniment. In the earliest of these Florentine operas, singers declaimed the story of the drama in musical tones, to a background of instrumental music which roughly followed their inflections and cadences. This was the birth of the dramatic "recitative" upon which the whole conception of opera rests. The basic idea gradually expanded until, by the eighteenth century, Italian opera had divided into two types—opera seria and opera buffa. The former was the serious type and was usually based on stories drawn from the classic drama or legends, with librettos in verse; the latter type was the forerunner of the modern comic opera.

There were two chief elements which made up these early operas—the arias and the recitatives. The arias were the main body of the opera, the set pieces, and they were accompanied by the entire orchestra. The recitatives were the connecting links between the arias, in which the singers acted out the drama, singing their dialogue in notes which followed roughly the inflections of the speaking voice, and to a light accompaniment of chords on a clavier. Thus the early operatic composers, being faced with the problem of wedding drama and music, ended up by not wedding them at all. In the recitatives they let the story of the drama and the action unfold, while the music practically stopped; in the

arias the dramatic action slowed down to zero while the composer elaborated his purely musical ideas.

Long before Mozart's time Italian opera seria had reached a morbid stage of degeneration. Conventions of all sorts had grown around it like barnacles, until a composer was left little freedom of inspiration. Everything was stereotyped: the plots had to be drawn from certain literary or historical sources; the arias had to follow certain fixed rules, and they had to be distributed among the singers in a fixed order. The singers in fact ruled the opera of that period. It was a golden age of the vocal art, the age of the great castrati, and the public came expecting to hear, first of all, singing—the more spectacular the better. As a result, what an opera composer produced was merely a collection of arias, loosely strung together by means of a libretto (usually in execrable verse), ignoring even the pretence of true dramatic action, but designed chiefly to provide a springboard for the singers.

It is no wonder that Italian opera, although the most popular form of musical entertainment in eighteenth-century Europe, was decried by serious musicians as so much trash. And trash it often was, except in the cases of works produced by geniuses like Handel. The great German contemporary of J. S. Bach wrote some forty operas in the Italian style, most of them for production in London. But so badly did the operatic form degenerate that, when its vogue had passed, much of Handel's most beautiful music was dragged with it into oblivion. Only in recent years have revivals of his long-dead operas brought to light the wealth of melody contained in his arias, and the richness and variety of emotion with which he infused them.

The reformer who finally arose to attack the clutter of conventions and pave the way for modern opera was Gluck. That doughty, hard-headed and hot-tempered German fought for twenty-five years to achieve a more logical balance between the musical and dramatic elements of opera. In 1767, when he produced his *Alceste* in Paris (where some of his best battles were fought), he published a famous pronunciamiento, in which he insisted that the music should follow, interpret, and enhance the story of the drama, not hamper and interrupt it; that there should be no vocal or orchestral display merely for the sake of ornament; and "there is no academic rule," he stated bluntly, "which I have not willingly sacrificed to dramatic effect".

Mozart was wild about the opera. From the days of his boyhood in Italy no other musical form attracted him so strongly. With *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung* he had begun to feel his powers, but for a long time he was frustrated, largely by conditions at the Viennese Court. There, as in most music centres where opera was performed, the order of things was held in the grip of the Italian singers. Powerful cabalists in their own behalf, they looked upon the opera as their property, and they tried their best to strangle the attempts of native composers to gain a hearing. Mozart was one of their victims; until there came into his life, in 1783, a man of remarkable talents and background—the brilliant, eccentric, half-mountebank, half-genius, Lorenzo Da Ponte. This was the man who provided Mozart with the librettos for three of his four operatic masterpieces—*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan' Tutte*. Together they made a team for the creation of operatic comedy that has never been surpassed in the history of the lyric stage.

Da Ponte was born in an Italian ghetto, in 1749, of Jewish parents. He subsequently embraced Catholicism and even studied for the priesthood, getting as far as the abbé stage. But a natural predilection towards women, those of a

wide range of ages and a generously broad standard of attractiveness, soon weakened his piety, and he embarked on a career of amorous adventure only surpassed in that morally lawless age by his friend Giovanni Jacopo Casanova de Seingalt. Besides a naturally charming manner, Da Ponte was aided by his striking appearance. His frame was tall and commanding, dressed in clothes of exaggerated elegance; his face was dark, his head long and narrow, with a jutting jaw and sunken, cadaverous cheeks; his eyes were deep-set, black and piercing; while between them was a great beaklike nose that bespoke the man's intellectual strength. He had in fact a considerable mastery of classic literature and for a time was professor of rhetoric at Treviso University. Gradually he acquired a reputation as a poet and librettist, and when Mozart first met him he had just been appointed opera poet to Joseph II. Some time after Mozart's death, having made himself *persona non grata* in Europe, he turned up in New York. There he gave private lessons in Italian, and later became a farmer, distiller and operator of a grocery store. In his old age he was the first professor of Italian at Columbia College. He died in New York in 1838, in his ninetieth year.

Da Ponte was not by any means a great poet, but he was a clever librettist. Moreover, he had a genuine appreciation of Mozart's genius, something which was generally lacking in Vienna. At his suggestion the two decided to write an opera together, gambling on Da Ponte's influence with the Emperor to get it performed. Mozart's choice for a story was the vivacious comedy, *The Marriage of Figaro*, by the French dramatist Beaumarchais. (Beaumarchais wrote a trilogy of Figaro comedies, of which *The Marriage of Figaro* was the second, and *La Mère Coupable* the third. The first was *The Barber of Seville*, which was set to music a generation after Mozart's time by Rossini.) *Figaro* was at first under a ban. Louis XVI would not permit its performance in France because it was a mixture of dangerous political satire and libertinism so unrestrained as to cause a possible menace to public morals. Naturally this aroused the public interest in the piece to fever heat. In order to get the permission of Joseph II for his and Mozart's operatic version, Da Ponte had to convince the monarch that he had excised from the story all its politically subversive elements. As for the moral aspects, H. E. Krehbiel once wrote that "it is, indeed, a fortunate thing for Mozart's music that so few operagoers understand Italian nowadays. The play is a moral blister."

Be that as it may, the story is undeniably funny. Figaro, the central character, had been a barber in Seville, and is now a valet in the service of a Spanish count. This nobleman finds his chief diversion in the pursuit of women, among them the daughter of his gardener and the charming Susanna, fiancée of Figaro. His wife, the lovely and melancholy countess who still loves him, plots with Figaro and Susanna to expose her husband's infidelities. The ensuing situations revolve round the age-old comedy device, beloved by librettists from the earliest opera buffa to W. S. Gilbert—that of mistaken identities, with everyone at one time or another suspecting everyone else. Among the subsidiary characters are a young page, callow, silly, and adept at getting himself into compromising situations; and a formidable middle-aged duenna (a type also beloved by Gilbert) who tries to trap Figaro into marriage, and finally turns out to be his mother.

The whirl of amusing (if not too refined) nonsense which Da Ponte concocted was transfigured by Mozart into the finest Italian comic opera that had yet been created. Mozart wrote the score in six weeks, and on its first performance, on May 1, 1786, it was received by the Viennese audience with frenzied acclaim.

So many of the numbers had to be repeated that the performance ran to twice its actual length, and at later performances the Emperor had to forbid encores.

*Figaro* is a prime example of what can happen when a form, beaten into a lifeless pulp by years of hard usage, is taken in hand by a great genius. In outline this opera is simply the standard mixture of arias and ensembles, punctuated by recitatives; but where it differs from its contemporary Italian models is first in workmanship—which is as finely drawn as a string quartet—and second in the quality of Mozart's melodies. They are so vital and charming and abundant that from beginning to end the opera never loses a champagne-like exuberance. Moreover, each tune contributes something to the character who sings it. This was one of Mozart's chief technical contributions to the development of opera. Before his time most operatic characters were mere paper dolls, types whom the audience could recognize by their costumes and their particular places in the plot. Mozart was one of the first composers to attempt genuine character delineation in his operatic music, and he had to do it without the aid of the leitmotiv idea, which was not yet invented. By this device Wagner, its most famous exploiter, was able to fasten a single descriptive theme upon a character and follow him with it throughout an entire opera.

*The Marriage of Figaro* has been variously revived in modern times—dismally, and with successes remindful of its première. In the former cases the fault is usually with the singers. *Figaro* must have (even before it has fine Mozartean singing) expert comic acting. The buffoonery must be played for all it is worth, and by artists who know all the tricks of the comedy trade.

## X

It is almost unbelievable that after its brilliant opening *The Marriage of Figaro* ended up its first season in Vienna a failure. Only nine performances were given in six months, and the work was finally withdrawn. Royalties being then unknown, Mozart's only income from the opera was a small lump sum (about £40) paid for the first performance. His financial affairs were getting steadily worse, so for a time he thought of going to England. There he might have enjoyed a measure of the good fortune that awaited Haydn a few years later; but the project fell through when he and Constanze realized that they would have to take their two small children with them. They first approached Mozart's father with the suggestion that he care for the children in their absence, but Leopold turned them down with disdain. He was now an embittered old man, still unreconciled to his son's marriage and way of life, still brooding over the ruination of his golden boy. He died the next spring. No record is left of his personal correspondence with his son during the last years, for after Wolfgang's death Constanze destroyed every letter which Leopold had written them after the day of their marriage.

Instead of England the young couple went to Prague. Mozart had heard to his amazement that *The Marriage of Figaro* had been produced there with tumultuous success. He found that the whole town was in fact mad about his opera. "Here," he wrote, "they talk nothing but *Figaro*; scrape, blow, sing, and whistle nothing but *Figaro*; no opera draws but *Figaro*, always *Figaro*." He went to a performance, was recognized by the audience, and for the first time since his boyhood received a public ovation that did justice to his genius. He received not a penny from any of these performances, but he did leave Prague

with a commission for a new opera, to be produced there the following autumn.

Naturally he turned to Da Ponte for another libretto; and naturally too, after their success with the amours of the Spanish count in *Figaro*, they hit upon the familiar legend of the archlibertine, Don Juan. Lorenzo was fully occupied at the time, preparing librettos for two other composers; so he had to divide his time, giving his "mornings to Martini, afternoons to Salieri, and evenings to Mozart". For two months (at least, according to his own account) he worked twelve hours continuously every day. On his table were a bottle of wine, a box of snuff, and an inkwell; at the touch of a bell there came (again according to his own account) a beautiful girl of sixteen who lived in the house. She brought him food, coffee, and inspiration. "I should have preferred to love her only as a daughter, but, alas!"

Mozart meanwhile fell victim to a serious illness, which sounds as if it might have been typhoid fever. The summer went by and little of the opera had taken shape. So in August the Mozarts and Da Ponte went on to Prague to finish their task. By a humorous chance they met up there with Da Ponte's old friend and hero, Casanova himself. The one-time great lover had reached the black ashes of life. He was old, penniless, and envenomed, decayed and yellow as a tooth; his voracious appetite for amours had vanished, and there remained only his ability to write about them. He was a librarian now, in the castle of Count Waldstein, working on his celebrated memoirs. No one could be better suited to give advice and counsel, as Da Ponte spun out his story of Don Juan, than this living prototype; and so legend has it that Casanova took a hand in the creation of Mozart's comic masterpiece, *Don Giovanni*.

The première of *Don Giovanni* took place on October 29, 1787, a date that has become a landmark in the history of opera. Prague received the work with a hurricane of applause; Mozart, who conducted, was cheered like a national hero. On thousands of occasions since then the verdict of that audience has been sustained, for *Don Giovanni* is one of the two oldest works still in the repertoires of the world's opera houses. The other is *The Marriage of Figaro*. After one hundred and fifty years the vitality of neither shows any signs of abating. *Don Giovanni* has been crowned with the encomiums of the greatest musicians and critics. Often it has been termed the most perfect of all operas. Part of the credit must go to Da Ponte. His play is written with style, finish, and wit; it is filled with good situations, dramatic surprises, and a variety of interesting characters. In short, it is first of all a good show.

The notorious Don is portrayed in all his suave licentiousness. He has seduced women by the hundreds. His servant, Leporello, lists their number as 2065, including women from Italy, Germany, France, Turkey, and Spain; women from every station in life, from princesses to rustics; women of all types, ages, and degrees of pulchritude. In the opera he tries to despoil the virtuous Donna Anna, and when her father, the Commendatore of Seville, comes to her aid, he kills the old man in a duel. He then tries to seduce a peasant girl, Zerlina, luring her into his home by giving an elaborate party. In this scene the orchestra plays music for three dances simultaneously, a waltz, a contredanse, and the famous minuet. Later, while hiding in a graveyard from still another amorous adventure, the Don receives a solemn warning from the voice of the dead Commendatore's statue. With blasphemous insolence he invites the statue to supper. It is a rash gesture, for in the final scene, while Don Giovanni is dining, the stony spectre enters and invites him to supper. A pit opens and Don Giovanni is dragged down to hell by a chorus of demons.



Mozart took wonderful advantage of the highly dramatic moments in this opera—the duel scene in the opening act, the appearances of the statue, and the final damnation of the Don. His work is therefore a blend of the lyricism of his finest Italian operatic style and the most effective dramatic music written up to that time. To modern ears these dramatic musical devices may sound thin and obvious; but that is the price we pay for our familiarity with other great masters who came after Mozart and who intensified the effects which he invented. Students of orchestration have always been interested in Mozart's use of the trombones in *Don Giovanni*. Like Haydn, he barred them from his symphonic scores; but he found a perfect place for them in the ominous music which accompanies the ghost of the Commendatore.

Mozart and Da Ponte had one more collaboration. In 1789, *Figaro* was revived in Vienna with such success that Joseph II commissioned them to write *Così fan' Tutte* (*They All Do It*). It was produced in January 1790. The story, partly suggested by the Emperor himself, concerns two young Neapolitan noblemen who are engaged to two young ladies. A cynical bachelor friend of the young men doubts the constancy of the two brides (and of all women, for that matter), so he lays a wager that they can be won away from their respective grooms. The two young men pretend to be called away to war, but return on the very same day disguised as Albanian noblemen. In short order each one woos the other's fiancée and gains her consent to marriage. Then the "Albanians" disappear and the original lovers return, to charge the ladies with their perfidy. All is soon forgiven and the opera ends happily.

*Così fan' Tutte* fell far short of the success enjoyed by its two predecessors. It gradually came to be known as one of Mozart's few failures. Da Ponte's libretto was often blamed—either as a piffling piece of nonsense or as a downright affront to the moral sensibilities of all good Victorians. A number of modern revivals, however, have put the work in a different light. The story is no more preposterous than that of many another comic opera, and Da Ponte's handling of it is exceedingly clever. Moreover, Mozart wrote for it a beautiful score, as charming and satirical as the little puffball of a plot demands.

The comparative failure of *Così fan' Tutte* must be charged in part to the average opera audience. Very few modern listeners outside of Italy have sufficient knowledge of the Italian language to appreciate either the wit of Da Ponte's lines or the skill with which Mozart (who knew Italian almost as well as he did his native tongue) captured their essence in music. Such knowledge is not as vitally necessary for the enjoyment of either *Figaro* or *Don Giovanni*. These works are so full of comical action and situations, peopled with such diverting characters, that one may get much of their flavour knowing only the outline of the stories. *Così fan' Tutte* is too subtle for that; its plot is too slight, its characters too artificial. Failing a knowledge of Italian, a modern listener can no more appreciate it than he could a Gilbert and Sullivan opera without being able to taste the full flavour of Gilbert's inimitable words.

## XI

After the productions of *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, Mozart's personal life entered a slow spiral of dissolution. Apart from his financial troubles, which grew desperate, there began a definite moral weakening. The free and easy life of Prague, the association with Da Ponte, a loosening of the ties which

bound him to Constanze—all served to accelerate the decline. He drank a great deal and there were rumours of affairs with various singers in his operas. His health began to show signs of a serious breakdown; in certain portraits of him made at the time there is evidence in the sallow face, the haggard, protruding eyes. His frail little body was rebelling against his reckless habits, the alternating periods of dissipation and cruel overwork.

After the première of *Don Giovanni*, Emperor Joseph II in a burst of tardy generosity made Mozart Court composer, a post left vacant by the death of Gluck; but at the same time the salary was reduced from two thousand florins a year to eight hundred. If the salary was a source of damage to Mozart's pride, the work required of him was even worse—nothing but inconsequential pieces of dance music for the Court balls. Meanwhile Constanze's health had broken down from continual pregnancies and childbearing. She was obliged to spend many months at a near-by health resort, another drain on their resources. Mozart began to borrow money. Having joined the Masonic order, he turned to a fellow Mason, a man named Michael Puchberg, who was a well-to-do merchant and amateur musician. Puchberg's generosity in answering Mozart's numerous calls for financial help is the one ray of light in the gathering pall of misfortune that settled about the last years of the composer. During the summer of 1788, in the midst of these distractions and a sudden despondency caused by the death of a six-month-old daughter, Mozart started writing a symphony. He ended up by writing three—and by achieving a feat of technical and inspirational speed that was without parallel even for him. He began some time in June, and by the 10th of August he had composed the E flat Symphony (K. 543), the G minor Symphony (K. 550), and the C major Symphony, the "Jupiter" (K. 551). Any one of the twelve movements might well have demanded the time he took to compose the entire group, yet he flung them from his pen with breathless speed. Perhaps his haste presaged the shortness of the time left him. These three symphonies—without doubt the finest produced before Beethoven—were his last.

Mozart's experience with the symphonic form was similar to that with the string quartet. He had written more than thirty symphonies before he reached the age of eighteen; but they are slight and immature works for the most part, composed chiefly to show off his precocity. When he came of age he turned to the form much less frequently. When he did it was to produce such splendid examples as the "Haffner" Symphony, the "Linz" Symphony and the "Prague" Symphony. Obviously, as a mature composer he began to sense some of the enormous possibilities of the symphonic form and the problems awaiting the artist who attempted their expansion. Here was no half-random collection of movements, bound together loosely as a serenade or a cassation; rather it was a union of several complex designs, each a separate entity and yet subtly affecting the others, all joined to make a large architectural unit.

The realization of these factors was clearly upon him as he wrote his last trio of great symphonies. Each has a separate mood, an individual hue, belonging to itself alone. Thus the E flat Symphony, after a slow, lordly introduction, streams with lovely melodies—warm, sunlit, and tranquil. The composer seems completely possessed by his youthful, carefree spirits. The G minor Symphony is suffused with melancholy. This was the brooding, dark strain in Mozart's music which startled his contemporaries, and which was one of the beginnings of romantic emotion finding its way into the classic forms. The G minor is the most often played of all Mozart's symphonies. It is also the most

beloved, because it contains so much of its composer's profuse art at its ripest, and perhaps because in its gentle melancholy it reminds the listener of the fate of its maker—to be divinely gifted, like Keats and Shelley, Raphael and Schubert, and to die young. As for the C major Symphony (called the "Jupiter" by no one knows whom, or precisely why), its last movement is a famous salient in symphonic history. The movement is roughly in the sonata form, but of a type which no one ever attempted before or since. The composer uses five separate themes and develops them fugally, spinning them into elaborate counterpoint, or singly in canon, and winding up with a coda in which all five themes sing together. The result is a triumph of polyphony worthy of J. S. Bach.

As for the symphonic form as a whole, Mozart's contribution to its growth was typical of what he did in every other form that he touched. He did not invent: he enriched. The larger outlines of the symphony he passed on to Beethoven much as Haydn had passed them on to him. He added a depth of personal emotion that Haydn's music did not have; otherwise most of his improvements were internal, and lay chiefly in the field of orchestration. He increased the size of the orchestra, to gain a greater range of dynamics and thus a richer expressiveness. His handling of the woodwinds was superb. Besides adding the clarinet to the choir, he gave all the woodwinds a more important voice in the instrumental discourse. His sense of their tonal values was extremely subtle, permitting him to achieve effects of a delicate beauty that remain unsurpassed. After Haydn had studied Mozart's last symphonies he remarked that only then had he really understood the proper use of wind instruments, and he lamented that he was then too old to make use of what he had learned.

## XII

In July 1789, Mozart wrote to Michael Puchberg, "Great God! I would not wish my worst enemy to be in my present position. And if you, most beloved friend and brother, forsake me, we are altogether lost, *both my unfortunate and blameless self* and my poor sick wife and child." Puchberg responded again and again to these frantic calls, but it was no use. The money disappeared, no one knows quite how; the debts piled up. During the following winter there were times when the Mozarts did not have enough firewood to keep their lodgings warm. In desperation the composer began to turn out pot-boilers—innumerable sets of popular dances for Viennese parties and balls, and even a group of pieces for chiming clocks and music-boxes. By the beginning of 1791 he was on the verge of collapse, and his output of serious music for the entire previous year had dwindled to almost nothing. Then there was a sudden awakening of inspiration and strength. He wrote the great E flat major Quintet (K. 614), and he began work on *The Magic Flute*.

The genesis of this opera (believed by many to be Mozart's masterpiece) was a vague train of notions in the mind of a man named Emanuel Schikaneder, who was actor-singer-manager of a third-rate theatrical company then performing at a cheap playhouse just outside of Vienna. Schikaneder was a coarse, vulgar man; but he was a shrewd purveyor to the public taste. His troupe played everything from comic operas to garbled versions of Shakespeare's plays. At the moment he wanted something which he termed a "magic opera", a kind of romantic fairy-tale which would be a vehicle for spectacular stage effects then

craved by the public. He approached Mozart, whom he knew casually, and the composer accepted the idea with avidity, conceiving it an opportunity to create a serious opera which would be truly German.

Schikaneder proposed to write the libretto himself, so according to his habit he stole an idea from a collection of oriental fairy-tales. As the work progressed the two men found that a rival company had beaten them to the same story; so they switched the motivations of their characters, making the good ones evil and the evil ones good. Then, because both collaborators were Freemasons, they got the further idea of making the opera symbolic of certain rites and mysteries of their order. Due to this odd agglomeration of ideas the libretto of *The Magic Flute* is a ragbag of confusion, from which it is now impossible to extract meaning or logic.

The story is laid in ancient Egypt, and involves the search by a young Japanese prince for the lovely Pamina, daughter of the evil Queen of the Night. Pamina is held prisoner by Sarastro, a high priest of Isis. Tamino is aided in his quest by a flute which has magic powers. He is accompanied by a bird-man, Papageno, who has a set of magic bells. Sarastro is revealed as a man of such noble ideals and character that Tamino tries to become his disciple. But the priests of Isis decree that he must pass through a series of ordeals before he may possess Pamina. After various vicissitudes, and with the aid of the flute, the lovers are united.

Even though this libretto contained no vestige of sense (at least, to those outside the Masonic order), it did have a kind of vaudevillian variety; and of this Mozart took full advantage. He wrote arias of solemn and mellifluous beauty for Sarastro, and magnificent choruses for the priests—music that reflects the Masonic background of the story. For Papageno, a clownish part played at the première by Schikaneder himself, he wrote comic songs in his best *Figaro* manner. To the malignant Queen of the Night he gave music that is pure Italian coloratura, full of vocal intricacies including a terrifying high F. Thus *The Magic Flute* is like a sheaf of samples of Mozart's skill in half a dozen different musical moods, each one representative of his art at its ripest and most opulently beautiful.

During the early work on the opera, Constanze, again pregnant, went to Baden; so to keep a close eye on the composer Schikaneder installed him in a small summer house (hardly more than a shack) near the theatre. There the masterpiece took shape, Mozart pausing only for occasional drinking bouts with Schikaneder and his troupe. One day in July there was an interruption. A gaunt, cadaverous-looking man, dressed in sombre grey, appeared at Mozart's lodgings and presented him with an anonymous letter. It was a commission to write a requiem, with the composer naming his own price. There was one condition; he must promise never to attempt to discover the name of the person who had commissioned the work. Mozart accepted, asking fifty ducats for the score; and then he began to be tortured by morbid speculation. His over-worked mind conceived the idea that the grey stranger who would not reveal his name was actually the devil commissioning him to write his own death music.

He had hardly begun before there was another interruption. The new Emperor, Leopold II, was to be crowned King of Bohemia at Prague early in September 1791, and Mozart was asked to compose an opera for the occasion. The subject was to be *La Clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*), a tedious Italian tragedy. In great haste, Mozart and his wife set out for Prague. Realizing that he could not possibly complete the opera in the short time left, he took

with him a favourite pupil, Franz Süssmayr, to help him with the recitatives and the orchestration. During the journey they worked in the carriage and at night at the inns. At Prague the entire piece was completed, rehearsed, and produced in the incredibly short space of eighteen days—a nerve-shattering ordeal which broke the composer's spirit. At its première *Titus* was a complete failure, and Mozart wept. He must have realized that even his genius had its limits of endurance, and that at last he had driven it too far. *Titus* is still regarded as a failure, a cold and pulseless monument to the composer's technical wizardry, only at brief moments warmed by inspiration.

The terrible effort of *Titus* killed Mozart. He returned to Vienna in a state of mental and physical exhaustion. But rest was denied him, for he had to put the finishing touches to *The Magic Flute*; and after its première on September 30, 1791, the task of the Requiem still faced him. Desperately he wanted to complete that work, and heroically he tried—in spite of horrible attacks of sickness during which his hands and feet swelled and his body stiffened. There were times when the effort of work was torture, but he would keep on until he fainted. Always the thought of the grey stranger haunted him like a spectre.

He did not finish the Requiem. By the end of November he was bedridden, but still he tried to go on, discussing the work constantly with Süssmayr, calling in groups of friends to sing the parts for him. One Sunday afternoon as they were grouped round his bed he gave them the parts of the *Lacrimosa*. They had sung but a few bars when he broke down, and they had to stop. He died in the early hours of the following morning, December 5, 1791, within a few weeks of his thirty-sixth birthday.

Constanze had practically no money, so he had to be given a pauper's funeral. At the last minute the few friends who went to attend the burial were driven away by a violent rainstorm. His body was placed with a dozen others in an unmarked grave, whose location the gravediggers could not remember when Constanze sought it out later. It remains unknown to this day.

### XIII

The Requiem, which was born in a caul of mystery, was destined never to be entirely freed of doubt. The circumstances of the grey stranger were a comparatively simple matter: the man was merely the steward of a certain Count Franz von Walsegg, a wealthy music amateur whose secret habit it was to commission works from well-known composers and then have them privately performed as his own. The Requiem was ordered for a memorial service for his dead wife, and it was so performed in 1793, with the Count himself conducting and posing as its composer. But the Mass was actually only half, or even less than half, Mozart. We know that he completed the first two of the twelve parts (including the Requiem, Kyrie, and Dies Irae), that he had left the next six parts in an unfinished state, and that his manuscript broke off entirely at the ninth bar of the *Lacrimosa*. After his death Constanze gave the work to Süssmayr to finish. He had followed the Mass from its inception, had talked about it again and again with Mozart. So he filled in the unfinished portions, constructed others from Mozart's sketches, and added whole new sections of his own. Not only was Süssmayr's imitation of his master's musical idiom deceptively good, but the final manuscript which he made and which was presented to Count von Walsegg was amazingly like Mozart's handwriting.

The result of this double deception and forgery is that no one knows how much of the Requiem is Mozart's and how much is Süssmayr's. For a long time this did not prevent its acceptance as a great work of art, indeed, as hallowed ground beyond the profanation of criticism. It was performed at Beethoven's funeral service, and at Chopin's. Actually, the Requiem is one of the great tragedies of music. It is a ruined emprise, which might have been its creator's most sublime achievement. Süssmayr is not alone to blame, even admitting the weakness of most of his contributions, and particularly his colourless, un-Mozartean orchestration. The truth is that Mozart himself did not sustain his vision in his own sections of the score. He was a dying man. He had driven the mechanism of his genius until it was flying to pieces under the strain. The wonder is that the Requiem contains what it does of his true greatness. His opening pages are superb, poignantly harmonized yet archaic in spirit, the ancient Church's expression of exalted grief. He rises to tremendous heights in the Dies Irae, painting the vision of the Last Judgment in a smoking, flaming prophecy. But thereafter inspiration falters; the commonplace ideas appear; only occasionally (as in the wonderful Confutatis) does the music match the text.

In a sense the Requiem emphasizes the tragedy of Mozart's own life, both as man and artist. His death was a destruction of genius as grievous as the death of Schubert. Because he left such an enormous amount of music in so many forms, one is apt to forget that it represents possibly half of what he might have accomplished. Beethoven had almost forty years of creative life after he had passed his boyhood, and Bach had almost fifty. Mozart had less than twenty. Moreover, the finest of Mozart's music is so perfect in design, exquisite in taste, undying in melodic vitality, that it is difficult to imagine how he might have progressed beyond it.

The difficulty is increased by contradictions which seem to exist between the man and his art. Bach's music is a paradoxical union of mathematics and emotion; similarly, Mozart's joins emotion with the most austere and formal classicism. His operas are a blend of joyous, ribald human comedy with music of flawless style and rectitude. His greater symphonies, concertos, and string quartets are the finest flowering of instrumental classicism in its golden age; yet they were created by a man who has been called the least intellectual of great musicians, who cared little for literature or the kindred arts, who lived a disordered and at times dissipated life that often seemed to belie serious artistic purpose.

These contradictions are in part responsible for a portrait of Mozart which has endured too long—as a kind of high-speed musical machine, operated with infallible skill, but not geared to man's deeper inspirational impulses; as an artist whose polished perfection of design and execution arouses admiration but never touches the heart. There are hundreds of pages of Mozart's earlier music which give credence to that view. But almost the whole of his mature output refutes it utterly. Such works as the Quintet in G minor, the Quartet in D minor, the last three symphonies, the piano Fantasia in C minor and the opening sections of the Requiem could never have been written by a man whose only concern was facility or surface brilliance, and whose art did not impinge upon his soul. In their great moments these works are deeply emotional, often profoundly so. They touch the human spirit as no music had done for fifty years before Mozart's time, not since Bach had written his last chorale preludes.

# Beethoven

1770—1827



IN THE HISTORY OF ALL THE ARTS IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO FIND A COUNTERPART for the idolatry which the world of his time and of a century after him reserved for Beethoven. During his lifetime he was acclaimed the foremost composer of his age; at his death all Vienna mourned, and twenty thousand people watched his funeral procession; he became the universal genius of music, and his work was placed on such a pinnacle that it became the standard by which every note of music written after him had ultimately to be judged. Not only an adoring public but the greatest masters of music who followed him—Schubert, Schumann, Wagner, Brahms—freely acknowledged his sovereignty. There have been periods in the past when Beethoven's music seemed destined for a decline, the inevitable result of overpraise and atrocious overplaying; but as yet the various recessions have never proceeded very far. Even today, after his works and his life together have passed under the devastating X-rays of modern criticism, his eminence in music is but partly challenged. Only one other name has so far entered the lists to dispute Beethoven's priority, and it is not the name of a follower but of a predecessor—Johann Sebastian Bach.

Beethoven's greatest music is so immense in scope and so revolutionary in spirit that it is natural to expect that the man who created it must himself have been of heroic stature, and that his life must have been a supreme adventure in the tragedy of human existence. Beethoven *was* one of mankind's great heroes, but not at all in the sense that his early biographers tried to make him out. The legend of Beethoven, the man of "godlike front and grace", the living mould of his own musical portraits, was a deliberate fiction, created by writers in the years immediately following the composer's death and perpetuated for more than half a century. There was no need whatever for the distortion, for evidence aplenty existed (and still exists) on all but a few important phases of Beethoven's life. Thus it was an easy matter for modern writers to crack away the thick layer of saintly plaster that covered the composer's personal self, and to expose the far more interesting man at the core—to give us the real Beethoven in all his vulgarity and slovenliness, his dishonesty, his eccentricity, as well as the oaklike strength of his heart and the immensity of his soul.

Outwardly, Beethoven's life was anything but heroic. It was prosaic and unadventurous, almost dull. His boyhood was spent in the small Rhenish town of Bonn, where he was born in 1770; thereafter he lived the rest of his fifty-seven years in Vienna, with only a few brief excursions to other Austrian and German

towns. He never left the boundaries of the Germanic countries. He never married; and though he came to know casually some of the other illustrious men of his age like Goethe, the close friendships which he made were for the most part uninteresting. He had many love affairs, but they followed one another with such regularity and were allowed to cool with such rapidity that there clings to them now a faint air of the ludicrous. The conclusion is inevitable that Beethoven's outward life was one of those (not uncommon among men of the arts) which are entirely subordinated to some inner spiritual existence. It was merely an adjunct to a great drama which was playing itself out in his intellect, and which manifests itself to us with overpowering effect in his works.

Beethoven's family were Flemish in origin; they came from the neighbourhood of Louvain. There had been a few painters, sculptors, and singers in his ancestry, and there had also been several dealers in wine. The composer's paternal grandfather was a wine merchant, and also a court singer to the Elector of Bonn. He seems to have been a man of character and stability; but his wife became a dipsomaniac and ended her days in an asylum. Their son, Johann Beethoven, the composer's father, was also a drunkard. He followed his father's example to the extent of becoming a court singer, and in 1767 he married the young widow of a valet. This woman, who was to give the world one of its great geniuses, was the daughter of a cook. She accepted her life with the dissipated Johann uncomplainingly, struggling with fortitude against poverty, too-frequent childbirths and ill-health. She was a sweet-tempered and patient woman who did what she could to make the lives of her children decent, but it was said that no one ever saw her smile.

The second child of the couple was Ludwig, born December 16, 1770. His boyhood was the nightmare to be expected for a child unfortunate enough to be born into a poverty-stricken family, ruled by a sot of a father. When he was five, Johann set the boy to work studying music, starting with the violin. Several other teachers (all of them incompetent) gave him lessons on the organ and clavier. One of them was a drinking companion of Johann's, and often the two men would roll into the house late at night, drag little Ludwig from his bed and make him practise. Johann drove the boy unmercifully. In his mind was the vagrant hope that his son might turn out to be a second Wolfgang Mozart. In 1778, at Cologne, he actually displayed the lad in a public recital on the clavier, advertising his age as six years. The boy was eight, and the father's deception was responsible for Beethoven's own mistaken belief that he was born in 1772, an error he did not discover until he was middle-aged. The prodigy scheme fell flat, so Ludwig settled down to the life of an ordinary schoolboy at Bonn. When he was nine he was lucky enough to get his first music instructor of genuine ability, a man who owned a manuscript copy of J. S. Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier". That immortal work, as yet unpublished and known only to a few musicians, remained Beethoven's Bible to the end of his life.

In spite of his failure to emulate Mozart, the boy Beethoven did have remarkable talent. By the time he was twelve he was a competent organist; at thirteen he had published three piano sonatas and a group of variations, and the next year he got an official appointment as assistant to the Court organist. When he was sixteen he was taken to Vienna, where he astonished Mozart with his ability at improvising. "Watch that chap," exclaimed Mozart. "Some day he is going to make a noise in the world." The visit to Vienna was cut short by news that Beethoven's mother was dying of tuberculosis. The lad reached her bedside only a short time before her death. His grief was almost unbearable,



and it was deepened by the shame of seeing his father sell the dead woman's clothes to the street peddlers of Bonn for a few cents more to spend on drink.

By the time he was seventeen young Beethoven began to be noticed by certain aristocratic families in Bonn, in particular the Breunings. Mme von Breuning, a woman of culture and breeding, took a keen interest in the gauche young man. She became his second mother and her house became his second home, a place where he met many persons of high social standing. Under Mme von Breuning's guidance he gained his first contacts with literature and the other arts. At that time he also met the nobleman who was to be his first patron, the profligate young Count Waldstein, who had recently moved to Bonn from the dark castle of Dux in Bohemia where Casanova toiled at his *Memoirs*. Waldstein's financial help, bestowed with great tact, was repaid in later years with the dedication of the piano sonata which bears his name. Meanwhile, Beethoven secured a place as violist in a theatre orchestra, a position which he held for four years. Then, in 1792, Joseph Haydn passed through Bonn, on his way home after his first visit to England. He urged the young Rhinelander to come to Vienna and study with him. Waldstein concurred in the plan, arranged for Beethoven a long leave of absence with pay from the Elector, and sent him on his way with a message that was both an inspiration and a prophecy: "Receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn."

## II

Beethoven was the third of the four composers whose presence in Vienna has attached that city's name to a radiant age of music—the so-called "Viennese Period". It is hard to see how Vienna deserved its place in the appellation, for Beethoven alone of the four composers received from the city even a portion of the honours or the security that were due him. Haydn's early days in Vienna were a heartbreaking race against poverty; the city received him only in his old age, after years of toil at Esterhaz and the generosity of the London public had made him secure. Mozart's health failed and his spirit broke after Vienna denied him the appreciation that another city, Prague, lavished upon him; and in Vienna Franz Schubert practically starved to death. It was typical of Beethoven that he had his career well in hand and his living secure almost from the beginning of his second visit in 1792.

The composer was then twenty-two, and he was a strange figure of a man. He was squat in appearance, being barely five feet four in height; but he was stockily built. His head was massive, with a shock of rumpled black-brown hair, and a complexion so brown and swarthy that people called him "the Spaniard". His cheeks were marked by smallpox, his teeth protruded, and he spoke with a comical Rhenish accent. But any smiles which the sight of this uncouth, unkempt young provincial might at first provoke were likely to be checked, for from the burning eyes came a morose and belligerent stare. He moved at first into an attic, but he did not remain there long. Waldstein and the Elector of Bonn got him into the salons of the best Viennese society; thereafter he needed only to seat himself at a clavier, and the rest was easy.

His forte was improvising. He could take a theme, any theme whatever, and extemporize upon it by the hour. From the instrument there poured an amazing stream of musical ideas—tempestuous bursts of tone contrasted with sudden and delicate pianissimos, headlong speed alternating with lyric tender-

ness. This was something new in music, something unheard of in an age devoted to the rococo and the elegant; the aristocracy of Vienna were fascinated. Young Beethoven found patrons eager to subsidize him, but when he accepted their favours it was with a far different attitude from that of any musician before him. Within two years he was living in the house of Prince Lichnowsky as one of the family.

The lessons in composition which Beethoven took from Haydn did not turn out very well. The older man was in fact an indifferent teacher, and Beethoven finally began going secretly to another tutor to get his exercises in counterpoint corrected properly. This deception continued for a year, until Haydn departed for his second visit to London; and then Beethoven went to one of the best teachers in Vienna, Johann Albrechtsberger, who was noted for his skill at ramming the essentials of counterpoint and theory into aspiring pupils. He was a rigid dogmatist, but the young man who was to be music's great iconoclast went to him three times a week for two years, deliberately subjecting himself to a discipline he hated. There must have been painful scenes between the old professor and his headstrong pupil, for Albrechtsberger once said that Beethoven never learned anything and that he would never write anything worth while. Beethoven was of course already sprouting with revolutionary ideas, but he had sense enough to realize that his early training had been entirely too haphazard and that he badly needed discipline.

Beethoven's first works of any consequence are three trios, for piano, violin, and 'cello, which appeared as Opus 1 in 1795, when he was twenty-five. Published through the subscriptions of more than one hundred persons, including some of the most distinguished members of Viennese society, the trios made a fine first impression. To modern ears they are very close to the idiom of Mozart and Haydn, but the musicians of his time had the feeling that something out of the ordinary was going on in them. Haydn was so disturbed by the third trio, in C minor, that he advised Beethoven not to publish it.

The next year Beethoven published his Opus 2, and this time he passed a milestone of immense significance. The opus consists of three piano sonatas, the first of the company of thirty-two works which Beethoven left in this form, and which go hand in hand with his symphonies and his string quartets as his most enduring contributions to the art of music. Compared with the huge specimens which he produced in his maturer years, these first three sonatas now seem small in size and restricted in emotional content. The best way to discover their historical importance, however, is to play first some of Mozart's piano sonatas, enjoying to the full their elegance, their exuberance, and their fluent lyricism—and then to turn to these first three by Beethoven. Instantly the impression gained is one of expansion, of bigness. A creator with a large hand and a bold imagination is at work; he is stretching not only the scope of the mine, but the resources of the instrument as well.

First of all, he increases the number of movements of his sonatas to four. (Mozart and Haydn had written four movements for their symphonies but generally wrote but three for their sonatas.) At the same time Beethoven charges his music with more dramatic drive. His chords are bigger and heavier, he makes copious use of fortissimos and sforzandos, he spreads the hands farther apart on the keyboard to widen the tonal palette, and he frequently underlines his themes, making them burly and masculine, by declaiming them in the low bass register. In the slow movement of the second sonata we come upon something like a revolution. The old type of slow movement stemmed

from the operatic aria; it copied a lyric style that was suited to the human voice. But, lacking the warmth of the voice, many eighteenth-century slow movements (even some of Mozart's not excepted) sound shallow and repetitious. They were in fact meant to be more ornamental than emotional. The slow movement of Beethoven's second sonata is marked "Largo appassionato," and it is the forerunner of a type of which Beethoven became a consummate master—movements of infinite pathos, solemnity, and mystery.

In the succeeding movement of the same sonata there is another revolution. The minuet movement had become a problem for composers. Haydn once remarked frankly that he wished someone would write a new minuet. In this sonata Beethoven dropped the old dance form for a scherzo, a substitution which he later made standard not only for sonatas but also for symphonies. It was a stroke of genius; for it provided something that the sonata (and the symphony), with its growing seriousness of purpose, badly needed—the contrast of humour. The very word "scherzo" connoted a piece of musical whimsy—a joke. The scherzo of Beethoven's second sonata is delicate and light as a fairy piece; that in the succeeding third sonata is bolder and more rollicking, giving a hint of the bursts of roaring Beethovenian laughter which would later be heard in his greater symphonies.

### III

Early in 1798, when he was twenty-seven years old, Beethoven made the shocking discovery that he was growing deaf. The precise reasons for this personal calamity remain unknown, even though biographers, researchers, and medical men by the hundreds have sifted every possible shred of fact and hearsay in the composer's life. It is fairly certain that Beethoven had contracted syphilis, and to this misfortune was for a long time attributed not only his deafness but every other failing of his body, mind, and character. However, modern doctors are agreed that this disease definitely did not affect his hearing. Whatever the causes, the results were a disaster which threatened for a time to unhinge the young man's mind. Here he was on the threshold of a great career; his virtuosity on the piano was making him famous with the public, and publishers were eager for his works; he was living well, with the comforts of a valet and the luxury of his own horse—and now at one stroke the foundations of his life and his art were both threatened.

At first he tried to hide his tragedy from the world, avoiding the society of other people. He became morose and irascible from the continual whistling, humming, and roaring in his ears. For a time he even contemplated suicide. In 1802, in the little village of Heiligenstadt where he spent the summer, he gave vent to his feelings in a written record of the horrors through which he was passing. This is the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*, which he addressed to his two brothers. Unfortunately, it is such a wallowing in self-pity that it almost destroys a modern reader's sympathy. In essence the composer states that only his art has stayed his hand from self-destruction. "O, it seemed to me impossible to quit the world until I had produced all I felt it in me to produce; and so I relieved this wretched life."

Although Beethoven's deafness in part ruined his life, the calloused fact remains that it immeasurably enriched the art of music. First of all, it shut him off from the career of piano virtuoso and forced him to turn the full stream of his intellectual energies inwards—towards composition. Then it put a wall of

solitude around him, leaving his mind undisturbed to wrestle with some of the hardest problems that ever faced an artist. The first effects are clearly noticeable in the catalogue of his published works. With the year 1798 he began composition in earnest, and thereafter the works came thick and fast. This is the so-called "first period" of his creative development, when his music is still based largely upon the styles of Haydn and Mozart, with occasional and startling leaps into the altitudes of the later style that was so peculiarly his own. Further effects of his mental state are also noticeable in the deepening emotional character of his music.

The temptation to explain the emotional content of works of art by events which were affecting the lives of the artist at the time of creation is dangerous in the case of Beethoven, who often turned out music of unclouded serenity while at the bottom of some dreadful mental abyss—and vice versa. The tranquil Second Symphony was composed in 1802, during the very time he wrote the *Heiligenstadt Testament*. Nevertheless, among his works in the closing years of the eighteenth century there are a few unmistakable hints of the tragedy which was desolating his personal life. One is the slow movement of the Sonata Opus 10, No. 3—the *Largo e mesto*, which is like a revelation of the inmost reflections of a sorrowing mind, worthy of a place beside many of the finest flow movements of his mature periods. Another is the Sonata Opus 13 which followed, the "Pathétique".

In spite of the mauling and battering that it has taken at the hands of several generations of piano students, and of concert pianists more richly endowed with technique than intellect, this famous work still ranks high in the literature of piano music. The debt it owes to Mozart's piano masterpiece, the C minor Fantasia, is incontestable: the opening Grave and the following agitated Allegro present not only the pattern but much of the spirit of the older work. But these facts do not detract one whit from the stature of the "Pathétique" Sonata. Its Grave sets the stage for some tragic drama, and in the Allegro the struggle begins. The whole tempestuous movement recalls the composer's own words in a letter to a friend concerning his deafness: "I will seize fate by the throat. . . ." Seize fate he did, and the piano strains from the fury of the attack. Here Beethoven was sounding another new note in music, driving the piano to dramatic, passionate utterance never attempted before his time. In the Adagio there is a respite from the furious buffeting; it is not by any means one of the composer's representative slow movements, but it is full of heartsease and tender lyricism. In the closing Allegro he was faced with a problem that he plainly could not solve. We feel his gropings towards a movement which would in some way match, and even cap, the wild clamours of the first. But his Rondo is an anticlimax. In spite of some effective moments it is still too much an eighteenth-century rondo in a minor key.

Even with this unsolved problem the "Pathétique" is a moving and prophetic work. In it Beethoven tried a new attack and he succeeded magnificently. He spaded the ground for his own future, preparing himself especially with the first movement for the real exordiums which were to come later—in the "Eroica", the Fifth, and the Ninth Symphonies.

#### IV

Beethoven waited until he was thirty-one years old before he published his First Symphony. At that age Mozart had written more than forty; but

Beethoven, besides being a slow and meticulous workman, was naturally cautious when he approached any form for the first time. The symphonic form was one which especially attracted and at the same time somewhat awed him. Not only did he delay writing his First until rather late, but he wrote in his entire life only nine symphonies—remarkably few from the viewpoint of his contemporaries. However, a glance at these works will reveal the real reasons for their comparatively small number.

The position occupied by the nine symphonies in the history of music is unique to say the least. Most of the idolatry which settled upon Beethoven in the nineteenth century centred around these works, and all nine were regarded as only slightly less sacrosanct than the relics of Holy Church. As a result, for more than a century they have been subjected to the worst case of overplaying that music history can record. Today there exists a sizable body of music lovers who can no longer endure them with real pleasure. These people are weary not only of the symphonies but of all Beethoven's music and all the idiosyncrasies of his style.

Listeners who have had this experience are not likely to be mollified by consideration of these works in their historical perspective. All the arts have their works which fascinate scholars for esoteric historical reasons, but which for the non-specialist seeking more than intellectual stimulation have become so much dead fruit on the vine. There is a strong suspicion in the minds of many music lovers today that some, at least, of the Beethoven symphonies have fallen into that category, and that they are being kept alive by the enormous reputation of their composer. Actually nothing could be farther from the truth, but if ever these works are to be gauged with anything like honesty they have first of all to be separated from one another. The chief trouble with them is that their reputation as a group has too much affected them individually. This group reputation can be freely admitted at once. Beethoven's nine symphonies are a tremendous achievement from every aspect—historical, technical, emotional, aesthetic. No other symphonic works have cut so deep a track into the art of music. But individually they are definitely unequal in merit and interest.

One of the soundest methods of testing relative excellence in cases like this is to consult the public taste. Over a long period of years certain of the Beethoven symphonies have maintained priority in the public affection, and these are the ones which music theorists have also crowned with their encomiums. They happen to be the odd-numbered symphonies, beginning with the Third. This does not mean that the remaining five are inferior works; several of them are as fine as any written in the eighteenth century, with the exception of the last three by Mozart; but no purpose whatever is served by a blind insistence that they are supreme masterpieces, worthy to be placed alongside the Third, Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth.

The first two symphonies are in many ways similar to the first three piano sonatas. Basically they are patterned on eighteenth-century models, but with internal evidence that their composer was trying to expand, intensify, and vary a style which had become hackneyed. They are full of charming melodies, their workmanship is as deft and easy as that of the elder Haydn, and their ideas flow with the spontaneity of Mozart's—even though we know that spontaneity in Beethoven's music was a mask, miraculously covering the most laboured of creative methods. The Minuet of the First Symphony is a little gem, one of the most engaging movements in the two works. The last movement is equally good; it shows what a genius can do with artlessly simple creative ideas. The best thing in the Second Symphony is an exceptionally beautiful Larghetto.

There is special interest in the opening bars of the First Symphony, because of the pother they caused when first performed in public. It was the custom of the time for composers to begin their symphonies with a few loud chords, as a polite signal to the audience to cease their chattering and pay attention to what was coming. These notes were invariably the tonic (or basic) chord of the particular key in which the work was written. Beethoven's First Symphony, though in C major, opened with a chord which led momentarily to the key of F. This piece of audacity jolted the critics so badly that they attacked the composer as a dangerous iconoclast.

Beethoven's Third Symphony is the great "Eroica", in E flat. It dates from 1804. Viewed from almost any angle, it must be rated one of the most important creations in the entire range of art. The "Eroica" ended the reign of eighteenth-century music. It pushed the works of Haydn, Mozart, and their contemporaries into a past which would have a steadily lessening effect upon the music of the future. It ended the convention of strict, impersonal classicism; and it began the new era of a boldly expressed emotionalism, which led directly into the romantic movement itself. With the "Eroica" Beethoven also brought about a fundamental change in the symphonic form itself. He rebuilt it entirely from the eighteenth-century framework and gave it the stature by which we recognize it today—the noblest, most commanding of all musical forms. At the same time he expanded enormously the possibilities of the symphonic orchestra, to meet emotional demands hitherto untried.

Thus the "Eroica" is a division point in music, from which the whole art begins to move in a new direction. This fact is obvious to anyone who listens to a performance of Beethoven's Second Symphony followed by one of the "Eroica".

The title "Eroica" (or "Heroic") was given to the symphony by Beethoven himself. The composer, like so many intellectual young men of his time, believed in the new ideal of liberty and the equality of man. He greatly admired Napoleon Bonaparte as the deliverer of the French and the possible emancipator of all mankind. His "Eroica" was to be a hymn of praise for his hero—who soon afterwards let the composer down in the worst possible way by proclaiming himself emperor. When Beethoven heard the news he was so angry that he scratched out the name "Bonaparte" from the title page of his symphony. Seventeen years later, when Napoleon I died at St. Helena, Beethoven remarked, "I have already composed appropriate music for that catastrophe," referring to the second movement of the "Eroica", the Funeral March.

The first thing that impressed the early hearers of the "Eroica" (and still impresses us today) was its physical size. It is nearly twice as long as the average symphony by Haydn or Mozart, with every one of its four movements laid out on a huge scale. In the first movement the composer completely rebuilt the sonata form. To fulfil his grandiose ideas he had first to discard a lot of old restrictions, the chief of which concerned the middle or development section, in which the two chief themes of the exposition are "worked out". In this section Beethoven added entirely new episodes not based on themes previously announced in the exposition—a grievous piece of audacity to the purists, but one which gave the effect of adding height and breadth to his movement. Then in his recapitulation he restated the themes of his exposition according to the rules, but he altered them for variety and amplification. Finally, he stretched out his coda to unprecedented lengths. Instead of a brief tailpiece that summed things up quickly and gracefully, he constructed a closing section that is almost

like another development. The result was a structure that must have frightened its first hearers in the year 1805, in the Theatre-an-der-Wien. No single movement so gigantic had been conceived since the opening Kyrie of Bach's Mass in B minor. As an example of tonal architecture, of abstract design, and of thematic organization, it remains an intellectual triumph of the highest order. Add to that the richness of its purely musical beauty and the impact of its emotional force—and the magnitude of Beethoven's achievement begins to be revealed.

Stunning though it is, the first movement does not by any means dominate the entire symphony, for it is followed by another movement which is in every aesthetic respect its equal. Having already outraged the Tories, Beethoven gave them still more to talk about by making his slow movement a funeral march. In size it is another Titan; in emotional force it actually surpasses the first movement. The apex of the movement is a huge central section which begins with one of the oldest of technical devices, the fugato (i.e. a fugal treatment of a theme without formal restrictions). The progress of the theme through the various choirs of the orchestra grips the attention of the listener. It is stark and terrible and shuddering; and it lifts the whole movement to an elevation lofty beyond description.

Obviously the conventional minuet was too puny a form to follow in the company of two such giants, so Beethoven made his third movement a scherzo—the first time this form had appeared in a symphony. This is also the first appearance of the true Beethoven scherzo—that apotheosis of cosmic laughter which roars and rollicks and dances until it seems to set the world to shaking. Beethoven's first movements and even his slow movements were paraphrased successfully by other first-rate composers who came after him, but no one has ever approached the Beethoven scherzo. It is his most original contribution to music, an echo of the strange inner reservoir of bacchic humour which was stored up in his soul and which counterbalanced his heavy burden of sorrow.

In his last movement the composer faced again the problem which he had failed to work out successfully in the "Pathétique" Sonata. He needed a summation which would somehow crown the splendours which had gone before. This time he came much closer to the solution, but the final clinching stroke still eluded him. The end of the "Eroica" is in the variation style, and technically it is a *tour de force* of the first order. But emotionally it does not quite round off the thunders which the preceding movements have sent crashing across the tonal heavens.

## V

Beethoven's creative processes, besides being among the most powerful ever to develop in a human brain, were also among the most curious. By a rare piece of good fortune a picture of their inner workings has come down to us—in the form of his sketch-books. Some forty of these are preserved, covering practically the whole of his creative life. In these books Beethoven recorded the hundreds of musical ideas which were the life germs of his works. Here the great themes which are now part of the world's language were born, but it was seldom that one of them came to life full grown. He had to work over them, with endless and agonizing labour, in order to shape them into the final form in which we meet them in his scores. At times he made as many as twenty different versions of an idea or theme before it finally suited him. Sometimes after

twenty different tries he went back and chose the first. In the forge of a fierce and burning concentration, and by the sheer weight of intellectual effort, he hammered and beat and hacked at the recalcitrant metal of an idea until he had shaped it into a musical design. Schumann remarked that "Beethoven finds his motives lying about in the street, but—he fashions them into cosmic utterances". One need only trace in the sketch-books the growth of one of his famous themes (e.g. the one that opens the Funeral March in the "Eroica") to appreciate that statement.

Beethoven's creative methods were unusual in another respect. There is strong evidence that, instead of beginning with the small bricks of his musical ideas and building them up into imposing structures, he worked in the opposite direction. He seems to have conceived first the building in all its magnificence and then tried to fashion the thematic stones which would have the necessary strength and adaptability for the construction process. As Ernest Newman expressed it: "We have the conviction that his mind did not proceed from the particular to the whole, but began, in some curious way, with the whole and then worked back to the particular. . . . The long and painful search for themes was simply an effort, not to find workable atoms out of which he could construct a musical edifice according to the conventions of the symphonic form, but to reduce an already existing nebula, in which that edifice was implicit, to the atom, and then, by the orderly arrangement of these atoms, to make the implicit explicit."

The difficulties of creating music according to such a method must have been tremendous; but Beethoven was fortunate in that he possessed, along with a sovereign imagination in the field of formal design, a genius for thematic development. He could make his musical materials *seem* to expand with the utmost naturalness and freedom, when actually he was manipulating them to fit closely a preconceived design of considerable rigidity. That is why, in the words of H. L. Mencken, "his most complicated structures retained the overwhelming clarity of the Parthenon". That is also why he was able to succeed so brilliantly in the dramatic style of utterance that characterizes his bigger symphonies, overtures, and piano sonatas. In these works Beethoven spoke as no composer had ever spoken before him. Fundamentally he was borrowing abstract designs from the spoken drama and adapting them for the first time to music. The long-drawn-out crescendos, rising from whispers to furious climaxes; the ringing declamations that are like battle cries, and the sudden silences that are as crushing as death—these were all effects for which he had practically no precedents in music, and he had to work them out with the utmost care. Every one had to be calculated, weighed, balanced, timed—so that the curve of a certain theme reached its height at the precise moment when the design called for a climax, or its depths when emotion was to touch a nadir. Many of these effects Beethoven achieved with an unerring sense of dramatic form. To this day they retain their elements of suspense and surprise, despite countless repetitions and imitations. He achieved them because he took the pains to suit his materials to an idea, not an idea to his materials. It required tremendous labour, but he triumphed by sheer force of intellectual effort.

The price that Beethoven paid for his methods of work was one which might be expected. When he succeeded he succeeded magnificently, but when he failed his failure was complete and hopeless. No other first-rate composer left a body of work so glaringly unequal in merit, with so much that is downright bad. It was obviously impossible for him to turn out his best music to order.



If he had had to compose as Haydn and Bach did, as part of the daily routine of making a living, he would have ended up in the footnotes of music history. He needed time to compose. Some of his greater works lay germinating in his mind for years, and often he had half a dozen of them in various stages of construction at the same time. If he was hurried, or if he began to lose interest in a particular work, it was likely to be botched. Practically all of the large number of potboilers which he turned out for a quick fee from the publishers are unworthy.

Another result of Beethoven's habit of work was a marked psychological warping of his character. Few men verified more fully the popular notion that to be an artist one must be fantastically eccentric. His temper was volcanic. In a restaurant he once threw a dish of lungs and gravy into the face of a waiter. Nor was his wrath confined to his social inferiors; it was poured just as liberally over his most generous patrons. At a rehearsal of his opera *Fidelio* he flew into a rage because a bassoon player was absent. When Prince Lobkowitz tried to placate him he nearly had an apoplectic fit. On his way home he burst into the Prince's palace and roared out to the horrified servants, "Lobkowitz is a donkey! Lobkowitz is a donkey!"

In matters of personal hygiene he never advanced far beyond the Neanderthal stage. His table manners were so disgusting that people avoided sitting near him in restaurants. At home he would spit freely, as the spirit moved him; on more fortunate occasions he took advantage of an open window, but at times of momentary confusion caused by intense preoccupation he might spit into a mirror. His lodgings were a slum of disarray, with clothes, books, broken furniture, and portions of uneaten meals lying about. His pianos were piled high with assorted manuscripts and papers; their cases and even their insides were spattered with ink. One of them lay on the floor, without legs. This baffling phenomenon was once explained by a biographer with the surmise that Beethoven must have liked to work while lying prone on the floor. Another suggests that because he moved so often it became too troublesome to have the legs continually taken off and put back on when the instrument was carried up and down stairs. He seldom remained more than a year in any house, and there were times when he moved so frequently that he was paying rent to several landlords at once. He must have been something less than the tenant ideal. As his deafness increased he often roared and shouted and sang at the top of his voice when he composed; but he was acutely resentful of any disturbances which might emanate from the apartments of his neighbours. A passionate lover of nature and the open spaces, he refused to shut out the air and sunlight from his rooms with such crude devices as curtains and shutters. As a result, persons in the neighbourhood were often startled by the sight of a formidable, bearlike man shaving at an open window, attired in a nightshirt (or even less); he in turn would be annoyed and somewhat mystified that the boys in the streets should be shouting ribald remarks at him.

## VI

Whole volumes have been devoted to the many peculiar aspects of Beethoven's love life. A man of strong sexual impulses and immense vitality, he was passionately attracted to women. He had affairs with women by the dozen, and he was wildly in love with a number of them at various times. He once admitted that his longest love-affair lasted seven months. As soon as his



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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

*Underwood-Stratton*

ardour cooled, the lady would disappear from his life, and another whom he thought just as desirable would take her place. He seems to have had no difficulty in making his conquests. There was something of the fascination of ugliness about him. Remarkable (even significant) is the fact that many of the women whom Beethoven loved were from the highest strata of Viennese aristocracy. They ran to a type—cultured, often physically beautiful, and with a kind of frail gentleness. Several of these ladies were so highborn that marriage with a commoner like Beethoven was obviously impossible. There is a strong suspicion that he dramatized to himself the pangs of his frustration.

The most famous mystery in music concerns the identity of Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved". After the composer's death there was found in a secret drawer of his cash-box a wildly effusive love-letter, the only one he is known to have written. The year is missing from the date, and the name of the woman to whom it was addressed is not given. The composer simply calls her his "Immortal Beloved". To this day no one knows for certain who she was, although specialists in Beethoviana have ransacked the archives of Europe for clues and their own brains for theories. Among the candidates suggested for the honour by Beethoven biographers are two sisters named Brunswick; their cousin Julietta, to whom the composer dedicated his "Moonlight" sonata; a fifteen-year-old girl named Teresa Malfatti over whom he made a fool of himself when he was forty; Bettina Brentano, the poetess and friend of Goethe—and a score of others. Every biographer seems to have his own favourite; but one of the shrewdest guesses is that of the American musicologist, Oscar G. Sonneck, who believed that the letter was written at a time when Beethoven must have been in love with two women at once. One was a lady named Amalie Sebald; the other was the mysterious unknown. At present it would seem that the odds are still heavily against the music detectives' ever solving this baffling case of identity.

The real mystery in Beethoven's love life concerns not any particular woman, but rather his conduct towards all of them. A favourite solution of the biographers is that he was searching, Don Juan-like, for an ideal woman whose discovery eluded him to the end of his days. Others (more prosaically minded) believe that because he had contracted syphilis he realized that marriage with any woman would have been dishonourable if not disastrous. But the causes are probably deeper, and psychological. The implication is fairly plain that Beethoven had a subconscious antipathy to marriage. He knew instinctively that a wife (and the possibility of children) would mean giving hostages to his art, that they would be impediments indeed to his great enterprises. Few men have ever had a greater need for solitude than Beethoven, and few have subjected themselves more slavishly to the sacrifices of their work. That is why his actual life story reads like a series of relatively unimportant events; it is only when we study his music that an entirely new and vast existence opens up. This is the world of Beethoven the artist, one which impinges but occasionally upon that of Beethoven the man. In this existence no woman had any place whatever. Beethoven's numerous love-affairs were simply the physical nature of the man asserting itself, calling him back constantly from his world of art to that of reality. Many another artist has answered that call with the first woman who came along, but Beethoven was too fastidious for that. He had a loathing for loose women; he was in fact something of a prude. Hence the elaborate and complicated procedure of constantly falling in and out of love—the only possible course with women of the finer type who attracted him.

## VII

The year 1804 (Beethoven's thirty-fourth) was a great one in the composer's life. It marked the beginning of a period which lasted about five years, during which he produced a whole series of famous masterpieces. His two greatest piano concertos, his violin concerto, two of his best overtures, the "Waldstein" and "Appassionata" sonatas for the piano, the Rasoumovsky and "Harp" quartets, the "Eroica" and the Fifth symphonies—all are products of this refulgent period.

Beethoven wrote five concertos for his favourite instrument (not counting two youthful indiscretions now ignored), and the last two must be ranked among his most successful works. These are the Fourth, in G major, and the Fifth (the "Emperor"), in E flat major. The "Emperor" dates from 1809, when the French were sieging and later occupying Vienna. At one time Beethoven had to flee to the cellar of his brother's house, not because warfare had as yet reached that enlightened stage which includes bombing non-combatants, but because the noise of the cannon distracted him so that he could not compose.

The "Emperor" Concerto is a work of regal splendour. For a hundred years it fascinated piano and orchestral composers who used it as their model—its dazzling passage work, its roar and clang of battle as piano and orchestra meet in jousts of strength and speed, the contrast of its affecting slow movement. It became the sire of a whole stable of battle horses upon which several generations of virtuoso pianists have pranced to glory. One can hardly blame them, for a piano concerto of this type can be one of the most exhilarating experiences for the listener, while for a performer it must provide satisfactions akin to a Roman triumph. The "Emperor" Concerto itself is at last beginning to show signs of wear and tear. Although it has not suffered to the extent of some of the more popular Beethoven symphonies, it has been heard too much for its own good. The slow movement retains its vitality, but much of the brilliance has gone out of the other two movements. Now that the dramatic boldness of their outline and general style is no longer a novelty they are left without one of their main props. The essential musical ideas which remain are not always first-rate Beethoven, and they are having a hard time standing on their own.

The Fourth Concerto, in G major, was written, oddly enough, during a previous occupation of Vienna by the French, in 1805 and 1806. It is a finer work than the "Emperor"; it is in fact one of the rare treasures of instrumental music. It has often been called the feminine counterpart of its masculine successor. In a sense the two works epitomize the two hemispheres which later made up the romantic movement—that upheaval in the arts during the nineteenth century for which Beethoven among the musicians generated the original pressure. Both works depart from the rigid forms, from the coldly classic dogmatism of the eighteenth century; both strike out into the new domain of a free and outspoken individualism. In the "Emperor" it is the heroic element which predominates, presaging romanticism at its most vigorous and brilliantly colourful. In the G major Concerto it is the poetry of romanticism which begins to unfold—the sentiment, the personal emotion which eighteenth-century classicists had held in restraint.

There is no more richly poetic work in music than this G major Concerto, yet its special beauty lies equally in its utter lack of pretentiousness. The tenor of the whole work is made clear in the opening bars. Instead of the usual

florid orchestral opening which served to give the solo instrument a later imposing "entrance", the piano itself begins—alone—stating its theme with the utmost simplicity and ingenuousness. In the whole length of the work thereafter there is not an extravagance or an overstatement. Here is the antithesis of that type of concerto which becomes merely a pulpit for the bombastic preachments of the solo instrument. Rather we seem to be listening to an intimate conversation between the piano and the orchestra. In the slow movement the dialogue suddenly becomes serious, and here Beethoven unfolds a matchless page. The form is like a series of musical questions and answers, in which the voice of the orchestra has grown agitated, overbearing, savage, while that of the piano tries pleadingly to make itself heard. Ultimately the quiet voice gains the ascendancy, and the stormy emotions subside.

Beethoven's Violin Concerto, in D major, is the composer's only essay in this form. Once again he employed his most characteristic procedure—that of taking an existing form and magnifying it to heroic proportions. In this case the procedure was far more difficult than with the piano concertos, as every modern composer who attempted the form has discovered. The violin is not only one of the smallest of musical instruments; it is shallow in dynamic range, and with an even more limited range of tonal colouring. Yet it is pitted against the tremendous resources of the symphonic orchestra. The composer must use all the ingenuity he can summon to avoid having the solo instrument crushed by the sheer weight of the orchestral forces, or conversely of favouring it to the extent of having the accompanying body sound emasculated. Beethoven solved the problem, and in so doing he produced the first modern violin concerto and the model for most of the works in this form since his time. The extent of his triumph and of the essential problem itself is indicated by the fact that, after Beethoven's, the really successful concertos for the violin can be counted on the fingers of one hand—those by Brahms, Mendelssohn, Tchaikovsky, and Sibelius. None of these surpasses Beethoven's; only Brahms's may be said to equal it.

Beethoven's work is noteworthy for the scope he gives to the best capabilities of the violin—its agility and its wonderfully moving emotional voice. The first and last movements are a virtuoso's stamping-ground; while in the slow movement there is a soaring and singing of violin tone which is rich in the extreme, and yet never cloy. If this work has a blemish it is in the closing movement. For the chief theme of this Rondo (which is by its very nature a repetitious form) Beethoven used a little tune like a hunting-song which is also repetitious. We get enough of its lilt before the piece ends. Few works by Beethoven are more completely in the vein of tranquillity than this concerto. No cloud of his dark despairs, no hint even of his moodiness, ever appears in its bright sky.

## VIII

It is one of the curiosities of music that the most dramatic of instrumental composers should have had only indifferent success when he turned to opera. Beethoven wrote but one opera, *Fidelio*, and it caused him some of his most acute disappointments. The instigator of this work was Emanuel Schikaneder, the same impresario who sired Mozart's *Magic Flute* (and who later died insane). In 1803, when Schikaneder commissioned Beethoven to write an opera, the composer pondered for a long time over a choice of subjects. He considered among others Romeo and Juliet, Alexander the Great, Macbeth, Ulysses,

Bacchus, the Ruins of Babylon and the Founding of Pennsylvania. He finally chose a libretto adapted from the French—*Leonore, or Conjugal Love*—possibly the only important opera libretto to be based on this praiseworthy but comparatively unexciting subject. The story concerns the efforts of Leonore to free her husband Florestan from a dungeon in a Spanish castle, where he is held a political prisoner. She disguises herself as a boy and enters the service of the jailer. Virtue and conjugal devotion are rewarded when, at the moment of Florestan's execution, an off-stage trumpet announces the arrival of the Minister of State who frees the prisoner.

The piece was first produced in November 1805, and it failed. To say that the time was not ripe is to put it mildly. Napoleon's troops had just captured Vienna, the aristocracy and wealth of the city had fled, and the audience was made up chiefly of French soldiers. Soon afterwards a group of Beethoven's friends met with him at Prince Lichnowsky's palace and pleaded with him for hours to make cuts and alterations in his score. At first he defended his brain child desperately, but finally he consented to make the changes. In 1806 there was a revival of the reduced (and apparently much improved) version; but still it was not right. Finally, in 1814, Beethoven made a further complete revision after the libretto too had been altered, and this time the opera was a success, with its future life assured.

*Fidelio* has been described as one of those perplexing works by a great master—one which some persons cherish but which opera companies try studiously to avoid. Its performances today are infrequent, but they prove that the opera is far from Beethoven at his best. He was clearly out of his element in the opera house; he had no sympathy with its people and its conventions. Moreover, he was clumsy in his attempts to follow a literary text. Words hampered rather than inspired him—a fact also apparent in his songs. In spite of his marvellous dramatic sense in abstract music, he had no theatrical sense, no instinct such as Mozart had for the feel of stage situations. The best thing in *Fidelio* is one of the four overtures which he composed at various times for the opera—the one known as "Leonore No. 3". In this work he established a new form in music.

Previously the opera overture had been a simple curtain raiser—either a short prelude to establish the mood of the piece to come, or a loosely strung together collection of melodies that were to be heard later. In "Leonore No. 3", Beethoven created an overture which was a kind of miniature of the opera itself. It established the mood, gave a concise outline of the rise and fall of the dramatic action, and a clue to the ultimate resolution of the emotional crisis. It was a brilliant idea, and the composer carried it out brilliantly and forcefully. "Leonore No. 3" is one of the most popular of all his orchestral works; so much so that senseless overplaying by virtuoso conductors has worn down for some listeners the sharp cutting edges of its contours, debilitated such dramatic surprises as its off-stage trumpet-calls, and even exposed the essential banality of certain of its themes. Nothing, however, could impair its significance as a historical landmark. It established the overture as a form artistically complete in itself. It also paved the way for an entirely new musical form—the tone poem, i.e. the symphonic exposition of a purely literary idea. This latter form was not developed by Beethoven himself, but by Franz Liszt, and it became one of the most characteristic essays of a long line of nineteenth-century romanticists.

Beethoven produced two other great overtures, one which was part of his incidental music to Goethe's *Egmont*, the other to Collin's drama, *Coriolanus*.

Both are masterly projections in tone of the dramas they synthesize. In certain respects it is "Coriolanus" which is the finest of all the Beethoven overtures. Added to its lofty pathos is a Baconian compactness which intensifies the tremendous driving force of the composer's ideas. Nothing could be more characteristic (and more a justification) of Beethoven's creative procedure than his handling of the motive which opens this overture—the two chords proclaimed forte by the orchestra, one long, the other snapped off short like the crack of a whip. It would be hard to imagine a less simple or a less promising musical idea, and yet Beethoven expands it into such a thunderhead of malignant power that it dominates the entire work.

To the effulgent period between 1804 and 1809 belong two of Beethoven's most famous piano sonatas—Opus 53 in C major, known as the "Waldstein", and Opus 57 in F minor, the "Appassionata". The former is a memento of Beethoven's passion for Nature and all her works. He composed it in 1804 during a sojourn at Döbling, in the midst of the idyllic countryside to the north of Vienna. It is one of those rarest birds in music—a virtuoso piece in the poetic vein. The first movement is especially beloved, for not even Beethoven, the archpriest of Nature, ever captured more of her serenity in music. His last movement is less successful. Monotony may be one of Nature's more subtly beautiful attributes, but it is seldom translated happily into music.

The "Appassionata" is another emotional torrent, more powerful even than the "Pathétique" Sonata, for here the composer's grip on his materials has the assurance of mature mastery. The first movement, with its opening of mystery and foreboding, its sinister four-note motive (which Beethoven later immortalized in his Fifth Symphony), and then its wild and savage outburst of revolt, gives us *Sturm und Drang* in essence. In his last movement he had learned how to avoid the anticlimax of the "Pathétique". Here is a close which is like the voice of the whirlwind.

## IX

Beethoven wrote sixteen string quartets, and there are good reasons for the often-expressed opinion that they represent his art at its summit. His first six quartets were grouped as his Opus 18, published in 1801. During his great "second period" he wrote five more, including three magnificent ones dedicated to Count Rasoumovsky, one of his patrons. Then he dropped the form until the close of his life, when he produced the five last quartets which were his valedictory to music. These works are not as well known as the symphonies or the piano sonatas, and by their very nature they are much less spectacular. But in them Beethoven maintained a higher level of inspiration and workmanship than he achieved in any other medium. To study them is to follow the progress of his art through all its stages, and to encounter only the choicest examples of each stage.

The six in Opus 18 belong to the period of the First and Second symphonies, when the composer was imitating Haydn and Mozart. What they lack in depth of feeling they make up in the deftness of the workmanship, the skill with which the young composer handled his delicate polyphonic strands. With the three Rasoumovsky Quartets, published in 1808 as Opus 59, he bridged a gap between the early six almost as wide as that between the Second Symphony and the "Eroica". As a compliment to the Russian Count to whom they are dedicated, Beethoven was supposed to have woven a Russian theme into the melodic



fabric of each of these works ; but that fact now retains only an academic interest. The listener today is fascinated by other features of these quartets. One is the comparative richness of their harmonic schemes. The most glaring weakness in Beethoven's whole armour is undoubtedly his harmony. It is something of an enigma that this man, who was music's great revolutionist, and who experimented endlessly with form, melody, rhythm, style, and emotional content, should have often remained an unadventurous and even dull harmonist. Some of his finest works are marred by harmonic clichés. The excuse is often given that in the symphonies Beethoven was handicapped by the brass instruments of his day, which were so restricted that they prevented sudden modulations to remote keys ; but the fact remains that Mozart, who had to score for these same instruments, was a beautiful harmonist, who seldom found it necessary to fall back upon the exasperating rocking back and forth between tonic and dominant chords that crops up again and again in Beethoven's orchestral work.

In the string quartets, beginning with the Rasoumovskys, this criticism becomes less valid. Here his harmonic schemes often advance far beyond the old eighteenth-century limits ; his tonal colouring is richer and it is full of surprising shifts and changes. The composer's imagination is once more working with a fine freedom, and the listener can scarcely predict from one instant to the next what is going to happen, so sudden and dramatic are the excursions into the unexpected. This applies not only to his harmony but even more to his melody and his methods of development. The pedants of his time were disturbed by the Rasoumovsky Quartets. More than one thought that Beethoven was playing jokes on his public. A certain violinist who was also a quartet composer, said to him, "Surely you do not consider these works to be music ?" Beethoven replied, "Oh, they are not for you but for a later age." The Rasoumovsky Quartets are indeed a forecast of the last period of the composer's life, when his art had taken another sharp turn. This was noticeable especially in their increasing interest in pure polyphony—as for example in the closing movement of the third Rasoumovsky Quartet, in C major, which is a tremendous and dazzling fugue. At the end of his career the homophonic style obviously began to become too thin and pallid for him ; he began to pack his music so densely and heavily, crowding it to the brim with such detail, that he inevitably had to return to the older polyphonic forms for his models.

## X

After he finished the "Eroica" Symphony, Beethoven had begun work on a symphony in C minor, the one now known as the Fifth. He laid it aside and composed, in the summer of 1806, the symphony in B flat which was later published as his Fourth. No one knows why he dropped the Fifth as he did, but from its character it is easy to surmise that he had trouble with it. The Fourth must have been a far easier creative task. It is a straightforward work, bearing little resemblance to the tremendous symphonies on either side of it. Schumann, in a famous remark, likened it to "a slender Greek maiden between two Norse giants". It is comparatively slender in emotional content, except for the introductory Adagio to the first movement. In general it is a throwback to the style of the composer's Second Symphony.

The Fifth Symphony, in C minor, is the best-known and most popular of all Beethoven's works, in addition to being the most popular symphony ever

written by any composer. This remarkable drawing power, as might be expected, has almost led to the ruination of the work itself. Conductors looking for an easy triumph have played it until, to many concert-goers, it must seem worn down like an old stone. When doubts arise about its ultimate value, however, one need only remain away from the Fifth Symphony for a few years, and then listen to it again with an interest that has been allowed to freshen. Then there can be no question whatever: this symphony is a masterpiece in almost every one of the multiple phases which go into the making of the most complex of all musical forms.

For sheer dramatic excitement it is one of the most effective pieces of music in existence. Every one of its four movements is superb; the last has the special merit of being the rousing finale for which Beethoven had long been groping. The whole work is so concisely stated and so judiciously balanced that (except for a too-long-drawn-out coda in the *Andante con moto*) there is hardly a superfluous note anywhere. Beethoven is here the complete master of his materials, and every one of his effects comes off with stunning power. A thousand commentators have let go their flights of fancy in describing the Fifth Symphony, for the music seems to be telling some tale of heroic adventure, both glorious and hair-raising. Remarking on the famous opening theme of the first movement, the four notes which have sounded their way to immortality, Beethoven himself said, "Thus Fate knocks at the door." Beyond that he gave no hint whatever of any further programme for the work.

The first movement is notable for its immense vigour, which is projected almost without respite and at breakneck pace. The music races like an engine, roaring and bellowing and threatening. The Scherzo is one of Beethoven's greatest, as it is also one of his strangest. "That dream of terror which we technically call a scherzo," is Professor Tovey's phrase for its macabre atmosphere, for the measured tread of the *something* which comes towards us out of the darkness, and for its sudden roars of sardonic laughter. By a master stroke Beethoven did not end this Scherzo at all, but ran it straight into his closing movement. The music moves through deep and tortuous subterranean passages, almost perishing from lack of breath, at last to burst forth into the blazing light of the finale. A superb effect, and one which has never grown stale. With Beethoven it was more than mere effect. It served to lace together the entire last half of his symphony; it gave cohesion to the work as a whole. By this device (and by actually restating part of the Scherzo in the last movement) he anticipated the modern conception of the symphony—as a closely integrated unit, instead of a loose-leaf collection of separate ideas.

Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (the "Pastoral"), written in 1808, has been widely regarded as the weakest of the nine. It has in fact deficiencies which for years caused conductors to avoid it, the chief one being a certain long-windedness. The work is unique in that it presents a definite programme, thus anticipating romanticism in symphonic music by several decades. Beethoven himself described the movements in his score as follows: "I. Awakening of happy feelings on arriving in the country. II. By the brook. III. Merry gathering of country folk. IV. Thunderstorm. V. Shepherd's song. Happy and thankful feelings after the storm." The composer also remarked that his was an "expression of feelings rather than painting", i.e. that he was giving an *impression* of nature rather than an imitation. Actually the symphony is a mixture of both procedures.

Beethoven's love of nature was an uplifting passion, the noblest attribute of

his strange character. It was inevitable that this feeling should find its way somehow, into his large-scale music. The "Pastoral" Symphony has some fine moments. The first movement especially is remindful of the exquisite peace which descends upon a man who leaves behind an oppressive city and reaches the haven of a quiet wood. The Scherzo, in the style of a country dance, with its folklike tunes and its rustic dance rhythms, is magnificent throughout. As for the Thunderstorm, it was the first thing of its kind in music, and it remains the best. Beethoven is completely pictorial here, with the patter of the rain, the crashes of thunder and the general atmosphere of suspense and terror. Where the symphony weakens and sags is in its second and last movements. Both are fatally long. In the second movement the composer tried to picture the dreamy laziness of his brookside mood, the very monotony of the whole scene. But the monotony of a murmuring brook is one thing, and that of music another. Beethoven's musical brook goes on for ever; its melodies grow tiresome and they are not sufficiently relieved by harmonic variety. The same criticism applies to the last movement, which is stretched out until its themes are exhausted, on a harmonic scheme (again, Beethoven's old trouble) which is exasperatingly plain.

## XI

When he reached his fortieth year the gushing stream of Beethoven's creative inspiration began to run dry. He entered upon a period of almost a decade which was so barren as to constitute a mystery. No one knows for certain why the torrent dropped down to a thin stream, but the speculations have been various. Some biographers think that because he had achieved a certain financial independence he began to take things easy. Beethoven was in fact the first composer to make a living income from his works. His fame had spread to such an extent that publishers all over Germany, and even England, were bidding for his music.

There are other factors which may have affected his production. One often given was the turbulence of the times. Europe, which had been shaken to its emotional roots by the Terror of 1793, now had the hands of Napoleon I at its throat. That wrecker of empires was at the zenith of his career. While he wheeled his armies like scythes across the face of Europe and made a punch-board of her capitals, plain men could only stand by and watch the wholesale uprooting of their lives and fortunes. Like every other person in the war area, Beethoven's personal life must have been affected by these events; but that they touched to any profound extent either the production or the quality of his works is doubtful. The French had twice occupied Vienna during the period of his greatest fecundity, but it would be a shrewd observer who could find traces of that fact in his music.

Beethoven's personal life at this time was certainly far from satisfactory. His deafness was now almost complete; ultimately his conversations had to be carried on in writing. A number of the *Conversation Books*, the tablets which recorded his social intercourse, are preserved—pathetic yet valuable witnesses to a great human tragedy. His career as a piano virtuoso was of course ruined. Spohr, who heard him rehearse in 1814 for a performance of the B flat Piano Trio, Opus 97, related that "there was scarcely anything left of the virtuosity of the artist which had formerly been so greatly admired. In *forte* passages the poor deaf man pounded on the keys till the strings jangled, and in *piano* he

played so softly that whole groups of tones were omitted." Beethoven must have realized his plight, for that was his last public appearance as a pianist. He suffered spells of deep melancholy, his irascibility and his outbursts of temper increased, and he developed a persecution complex. In 1812, when Goethe met him for the first time, the poet noted that "unfortunately he is an utterly untamed personality (not altogether in the wrong in holding the world to be detestable) but who does not make it any more enjoyable either for himself or others by his attitude. He is to be excused, on the other hand, and much to be pitied."

Biographers no longer try to hide the fact that one of the weaknesses of Beethoven's character was plain dishonesty. He considered publishers fair game, cheating them right and left, until one of them in London warned his colleagues, "For God's sake don't buy anything of Beethoven." He even cheated the Royal Philharmonic Society of London. When they commissioned him to compose something especially for them, he sent three old and inferior scores—the "King Stephen", "Ruins of Athens", and "Name Day" overtures. For his greatest sacred work, the *Missa Solemnis*, he reserved his most flagrantly dishonest dealings of all—a long and involved series of shady negotiations with half a dozen publishers who were bidding for the rights to the score.

One of the meanest chapters in the composer's life concerns his treatment of his two sisters-in-law. His brother Johann had been entangled in an affair with a young lady of uncertain morality. It was none of brother Ludwig's business, yet the composer suddenly became righteously indignant and demanded that Johann and his paramour separate at once. When Johann refused, Ludwig went to the church and civil authorities, and a police order was issued giving the woman notice to get out of town. Johann then proceeded to marry her, thus making an honest woman of the lady and a fool of his brother.

Equally unfortunate was Beethoven's treatment of the widow of his brother Carl, who died in 1815. Carl's will stipulated that the guardianship of his nine-year-old son should be shared by his widow and his famous brother. It was a foolish idea, for Carl knew very well that these two disliked each other. There was a further stipulation in the will that the boy was definitely to remain in the custody of his mother. In spite of his brother's dying wish, the composer immediately tried to get young Carl away from his mother, and there ensued long series of family wrangles that were as sordid as they were stupid. Beethoven took his case to the courts, and for years the affair dragged on—a minor *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* which drained the composer's fortunes and ruined what was left of his temper. He finally got full legal custody of young Carl, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. Even though Beethoven loved the boy with the maudlin devotion of a lonely bachelor, he was the worst possible kind of guardian; the mere presence of the boy in a household as chaotic as Beethoven's was scandalous to begin with. In 1819 young Carl ran away and went back to his mother. Again the uncle went to the courts, and the unwilling nephew was returned. As he grew to manhood Carl turned out to be a weakling. He became an increasing trial to his uncle until finally, when he reached the age of twenty, he tried to kill himself. At his trial he declared publicly that his uncle had driven him to the desperate act by constantly tormenting him about his conduct.

Few portraits of great men are less flattering than that of Beethoven in these middle years of his life—wrangling with the unfortunates who were his relatives, venting his spleen on his best friends, letting his affairs descend into disorder while he sat in the gloom of his terrible solitudes, his art almost at a standstill;

forgetting the principles of common honesty and, at times, decency, surrendering the finer attributes of his character to the misanthropic and the mean. It is well to remember that, as Goethe said, he was to be excused and much to be pitied.

He had one solace outside of his music, and that was reading. He believed it his solemn duty as an artist to feed his intellect with the best thought of every age. Because his early education had been neglected he knew little Latin and no Greek; but he seized every German translation he could get of the great ancients—Homer, Plutarch, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Euripides, Horace, and Ovid. He loved Shakespeare, and he was well acquainted with Moore, Byron, and Sir Walter Scott. Of the Germans he knew intimately the works of Schiller, Lessing, Klopstock, and the rest of the group who contributed to the *Sturm und Drang* period of German literature. He read Immanuel Kant in later life; but above all he adored Goethe, the man who towered over German literature—whose youthful *Werther* signalled the opening of *Sturm und Drang*, and whose mature *Faust* lighted the way of the romanticists of every country in Europe. Beethoven read him almost daily.

The dark period in the composer's life was not completely barren. There were occasional flashes of his old inspiration, momentary but brilliant, as exemplified by his Seventh and Eighth symphonies, which were both composed in 1812. The Seventh Symphony must be ranked among a small group of Beethoven's grandest works. The temptation to agree that it is "the most beautiful symphony ever written" is strong indeed. Here Beethoven pronounced no cosmic problems; he let loose no dramatic conflicts of the soul. He simply took the spacious frame of the symphonic form and filled it to the brim with melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas of the first order. Richard Wagner called the Seventh Symphony an "apotheosis of the dance". Every one of its four movements could almost be called a study in pure rhythm, so compelling is the feeling of pace, of irresistibly propelled motion, that pervades the work from beginning to end.

The Eighth Symphony, when it first appeared, was a matter of considerable disappointment to Beethoven's followers. He had fed them on the strong meat of his "Eroica", Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies until they had got to like it; now they complained when he seemed to serve them up milk toast from an old eighteenth-century bowl. The Eighth Symphony remained unloved for a long time (it was actually an early custom to interpolate the immensely popular Allegretto of the Seventh, to give it a lift) and even today it suffers a certain measure of neglect. As soon as the listener relinquishes the notion that it must be compared with the giants among Beethoven's symphonies, the Eighth becomes a charming and enjoyable work. It is a study in high spirits—in whimsical, almost nonsensical humour. For this purpose Beethoven deliberately harked back to the symphony of Haydn, scaling down both the size of the work and its emotional voltage. There is no slow movement; all four sections are bright and gay. Even the usual Beethoven scherzo becomes a scherzando, a light-footed harlequinade. The last movement is musical humour in essence, for it is a boisterous collection of the composer's best jokes. A friend once asked Beethoven which one of his symphonies was his favourite (there were then only eight), and he replied, "The 'Eroica'." One would like to hazard the guess that the symphony which he most enjoyed writing was the Eighth.

## XII

After the lean years had passed, Beethoven entered upon the closing phase of his life, a decade, beginning in 1817, during which there was a mystical return of his creative strength. The music of this last period is often called the most difficult ever written; it challenges both the technical equipment and the intellect of the greatest interpreters, and it reaches heights of music aesthetics which had never before been scaled and which remain not entirely explored to this day. The works are comparatively few in number, but some of them are monumental—the Ninth Symphony, the *Missa Solemnis*, the “*Hammerklavier*” Sonata and the Sonata Opus 111 for piano, the last five string quartets. For a long time the quartets especially were considered utterly incomprehensible. Early quartet players were so baffled that they refused to play them at all, until the realization dawned upon a more understanding public that in them lay much of Beethoven’s lasting greatness as an artist.

One of the chief reasons for the difficult character of this music is the fact that it bears scars—the unmistakable scars of a lacerating mental conflict through which they were brought to fruition. Beethoven in this period was actually in a kind of transitional stage. He was in a spiritual agony, trying to shape his music into new contours, to push it out beyond all known borders; frustration tortured him when the solution of his problems eluded him.

The Ninth Symphony itself gives ample evidence of that struggle. Beethoven began it in 1817, five years after he composed the Eighth, and he worked on it off and on for about six years. When first performed (in Vienna, on May 7, 1824) it stunned the audience by its magnitude. It runs for an hour and ten minutes, and the last movement requires, in addition to the usual symphonic orchestra, a large chorus of voices and four vocal soloists, for it is a setting of Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*. This gargantuan size, plus the loftiness of the composer’s aims, helped for a time to place the work on a pedestal beyond critical reach. It was long considered the most sublime work of music ever conceived. Then, inevitably, the reaction set in; the cracks in the walls could not be ignored for ever. In our own times there are some who regard this symphony as a bore and a failure. Critics often say that it is a hybrid, an unsuccessful attempt to fuse the symphonic and choral styles; that the voice parts sometimes become dreadful screeching because Beethoven was deaf and no longer remembered their proper range; that Schiller’s poem is not worthy of a setting as inspired as Beethoven attempted in his last movement, and that that movement itself is a gigantic anticlimax. There is an element of fact in all of these criticisms of the Ninth Symphony, but the truth is that they do not essentially weaken its structure. The real flaws are to be found elsewhere, and even they—bad as they are—do not bring down the entire mighty arch.

There is no greater first movement in all symphonic literature than its stupendous opening. Only the first movements of the “*Eroica*” and Brahms’s First Symphony may stand comfortably beside it. “A Titan wrestling with the Gods,” was Wagner’s description of Beethoven; and it was never more apt than in this furious and storm-racked tragedy with which the Ninth Symphony begins. As for the Scherzo, it is the greatest of all Beethoven’s scherzos. It is his masterpiece in a form in which he had no rivals. The first real weakness of the symphony appears, not in the finale as is so commonly stated, but in the third movement, the Adagio. Here is a decline in power where we might least

expect it, where indeed we have a right to demand a surpassing effort—the equivalent of the Funeral March of the “Eroica” or the Adagio of the C sharp minor Quartet. The Adagio of the Ninth Symphony falls far short of those poignant deeps. Beethoven himself spoke of the extreme difficulty he had with its composition. He left it to the last, and even then he could not seem to get it moving. The movement is long and meandering, variegated with portions of loveliness and others of heavy dullness; and once again Beethoven’s harmonic platitudes betray him. The dramatic tension, so marvellously keyed up in the first two movements, is almost fatally loosened; it requires a supreme effort on the part of the composer to regain the interest he has lost.

But he does regain it, even though at the opening of the final movement he also faced a problem of extreme difficulty: how to achieve the “joint” between the three purely abstract and wholly symphonic movements and his oratoriolike finale, with its solo voices and its chorus. He solved the problem, and with an episode that is the high point of the whole work. His finale opens stormily, leading to agitated recitatives for the basses alone, ominous and protesting figures that are like a great voice delivering angry speech; ghostly sections of the first three movements come and go like wraiths on the wind; a magnificent choralelike theme unfolds itself at length; there is a return to the stormy mood of the opening, and then the protesting orchestra is suddenly interrupted by the first sound of a human voice—a ringing challenge from the baritone that pierces the orchestral gloom like a shaft of light. Thereafter the entire apparatus of soloists, chorus, and orchestra is set in motion, publishing the various stanzas of Schiller’s poem. It is an undeniable fact that these ensuing sections are not of equal merit. For one thing, Beethoven makes indifferent use of his soloists; nothing that they do either singly or as a quartet approaches the baritone’s superb opening recitative. The extreme end falls flat, when the composer’s sense of dramatic effect momentarily fails. On the other hand, there are many dramatic moments in this finale which are as powerful as any in the symphonies; several of the choruses are worthy of a place in Bach’s B minor Mass. The work as a whole succeeds in projecting an impression of epic grandeur.

The Ninth Symphony then must stand as a huge experimental monument in music, and one which is only partially successful. Over it there hangs a cloud, not of failure, but of unfulfilment. The outlines of what the composer tried to accomplish are there, and they are inspired, incomparable; but he had not quite the creative strength to bring all the details to a rounded completion.

Further evidence of the metamorphosis through which Beethoven’s art was passing during his last years is to be found in his last four piano sonatas. These are the Sonatas Opus 106 (the “Hammerklavier”), Opus 109, Opus 110, and Opus 111, which were composed between 1818 and 1822. Here is contained music which transcends everything he ever composed for the instrument. Here also is the majesty of sheer size. The composer has returned to forms which he had already magnified and is expanding them still further to the limits of their endurance. The “Hammerklavier” Sonata is simply mammoth—a taxing experience both for the performer and the listener. In all these sonatas, moreover, there is a complexity which had been lacking in keyboard music since the death of Bach. They have the density, the weight and force of an immense concentration of ideas that is remindful of Bach’s polyphony. Beethoven returned especially to the fugue, a form which had fascinated him all through his life. The closing movements of three of his last five piano sonatas are fugal. He also begins to break down certain fundamental restrictions of the sonata

form itself. He had long since ceased to observe the orthodox rules about the number of movements, and had written sonatas with three, four, and sometimes only two movements. Now at times he ignores the very boundaries of the movements; it is often hard to tell when one movement leaves off and another begins. There are sudden and unaccountable changes of tempo and mood, as if the composer were developing according to no known procedure but with rhapsodic freedom. It becomes more and more difficult to predict what the next bar or the next note might be. The listener must give it his complete attention every instant or he will lose track of the composer's musical scenario. Above all, there is present the constant pressure of a compelling emotion. This is especially true in certain of the slow movements. No music touches more profound depths of pathos, of grief nobly restrained, than these elegies of Beethoven's last years. In the last piano sonatas there are several notable examples—those of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, and the Sonatas Opus 109 and Opus 111.

The net result of all these qualities is that combination of aesthetic perfection and a vaguely unsatisfactory diffuseness which appears again and again in art that is passing through a stage of transition. It is an easy matter to point out in the piano sonatas passages which are totally unpianistic, places where the music becomes so abstract that the capabilities of the instrument are ignored; it is easy to find disturbing thickness in chords in the bass, ugly combinations of tones spread too far apart, unfortunate use of a polyphonic style for which the piano as a percussive instrument has little aptitude. Most glaring example of all is probably the fugue which ends the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, a movement which many of the most ardent Beethoven admirers have put down as unplayable, tortured, and even monstrous. There is no use denying these blemishes; they exist as an integral part of Beethoven's mature art, just as certain weaknesses of character were part of the man. They merely reiterate the fact that of all great artists he was one of the most uneven. He was the archiconoclast, the rule-breaker, the experimenter, the eternal pioneer in music. And he was completely unpredictable. Not only his last piano sonatas but many of the others contain such flaws and impurities. Nevertheless, they can never seriously detract from the achievement which these thirty-two works represent as a whole—to the Shakespearean abundance and range, the congregation of ideas, and the protean variety of their presentation. These are the things which have held even the severest critics of Beethoven enthralled. These and the fact that one man could have taken the slight frame of the eighteenth-century sonata and built it as he did into such a labyrinth of magnificent rooms.

### XIII

The *Missa Solemnis* (or *Solemn Mass*), in D, is Beethoven's largest work. It was originally planned for the installation of Archduke Rudolph as Archbishop of Olmutz, and Beethoven began it in 1818. At that time he was also working on the Ninth Symphony. The installation occurred in 1820, but the Mass was not ready. It had grown in the composer's mind to such proportions and was causing him such creative agonies that another three years went by before it was finally finished. Even then Beethoven hated to let it pass irrevocably to the publishers, but kept revising it constantly. He changed the tympani parts in the *Agnus Dei* so many times that he wore a hole in the thick manuscript



paper. However, he was able to capitalize (quite literally) on the delay by the hoodwinking of six different publishers, to each of whom he had promised the publication rights. Then, having closed an excellent deal with a seventh, he delayed publication still further while he sent round petitions to various European courts, offering manuscript copies of the Mass at fifty ducats each. Thus he was able to use his most sacred work as a means of squeezing money out of the two classes of persons he hated most—publishers, whom he once described as “hellhounds”, who licked and gnawed his brain; and the “princely rabble”, whose system of patronage he loathed and helped destroy, but nevertheless dipped into with a free hand throughout his life.

The only other work in music to which the *Missa Solemnis* might be compared is Bach's B minor Mass. Both are scored for chorus, soloists, and orchestra (although Bach's orchestra, of course, is a mere eighteenth-century rudiment of Beethoven's elaborate symphonic band). Both works outgrew their original proportions and became far too big for actual use in a church service. Thereafter the two treatments of the same idea differ radically. Beethoven himself confidently believed that the *Missa Solemnis* was his greatest work, but today not many accept his estimate. Judged as a whole, it falls below his finer symphonies and string quartets. Compared with Bach's Mass, it comes off a poor second.

It should be remarked at once that Bach had an unassailable advantage. He was working in a medium that was second nature to him. His lifework had been the musical interpretation of liturgies—as manifested in his flood of cantatas, his Masses, Passions, and motets. He understood profoundly the handling of choral writing. His style, inspiration, and sympathies were perfectly geared to music of this type. Thus his B minor Mass is the climax both of his own art and of church music as it had been developing for hundreds of years, and as it is still conceived today. Beethoven, on the other hand, began his task with comparatively little practical experience for the thing he was attempting. A previous and much smaller Mass in C, the weak “Mount of Olives” Oratorio, and a few unimportant cantatas almost sum up his liturgical works. He had little aptitude for vocal writing and he disliked having to adapt his musical ideas to words. Moreover, his whole art had been dedicated to the development of a dramatic and intensely personal style which was the exact opposite of the ecclesiastical idiom.

As a result, the *Missa Solemnis* became a battleground upon which some of the composer's most agonized creative struggles took place. The opening Kyrie is undistinguished and melodically dry, and so is the Gloria. Not until he reached the Credo did the composer really get into his stride. The Crucifixus and the *Et vitam venturi* are full of splendour, and there is a brief instrumental prelude to the *Benedictus* which is the inspirational peak of the whole work. The *Benedictus* itself is a lovely violin solo and is in the style of an Ave Maria; but the *Agnus Dei* is again a mixture of the great Beethoven and the commonplace. The composer apparently had a hard time deciding whether to end brilliantly for effect or quietly as the text demands, so he fell into an anticlimax between the two.

It used to be the fashion to criticize (and also vaguely excuse) the *Missa Solemnis* on the grounds that it is too dramatic, and hence too secular in style, to be classed as religious music at all. This may be so, although it would seem that the glory of God might be celebrated in many different ways. (Joseph Haydn's remark on the subject is certainly worth remembering.) At any rate,

the faults of the *Missa Solemnis* run to deeper causes than that. Actually the composer was at war with himself. He was a master of instrumental music trying to write vocally, a symphonist trying to mix a symphonic orchestra with choral masses, an abstract dramatist in music trying to be a liturgical interpreter. These handicaps were too great.

## XIV

With the *Missa Solemnis* and the Ninth Symphony finally out of the way, Beethoven had but a few years left of life. They were years of misery and mental anguish. He found little comfort in the honours which were heaped upon him from all sides. By this time he was the most famous musician in Europe, with his works in demand everywhere and his financial security assured. England tried to lure him for a visit, to pay him the homage she had lavished upon Haydn; Vienna acclaimed him, and had relieved him of the duty of paying taxes. At the first performance of the Ninth Symphony he received an ovation greater than that reserved for royalty. But the vivid colours of life had drained away, and his mind was all greys and blacks. His health began to break; there were premonitions of death. At times he reached a detachment from the world like that of Rembrandt in the last poverty-bitten years of the painter's life, but he never achieved the serenity of spirit that glowed in Rembrandt's face. Promethean struggles still possessed him; while walking in the country he shouted to himself, waved his arms, and gesticulated wildly at unseen foes; oxen were frightened and fled. It was not uncommon for strangers to believe him insane.

He turned again to the string quartet, and in the course of three years he wrote five. They were his last works—"the last of life for which the first is made". In the sober nomenclature of music they are known simply as String Quartets Opus 127 in E flat, Opus 130 in B flat, Opus 131 in C sharp minor, Opus 132 in A minor, and Opus 135 in F. They are unlike any other of Beethoven's works. Deliberately he turned his back on the grand style of the bigger symphonies and sonatas, the overtures and the colossal Mass. He quenched the passions that had so often set his works ablaze. For these string quartets there was to be no music "but what is grave and doric". All is subdued, ascetic, and introspective. The greyiness of the composer's mind tinges even the brightness of some of the allegros. Emotion is present as always, but it flows inward and at great depth. In certain of the slow movements Beethoven surpasses even himself, notably in the Adagio with which the C sharp minor Quartet begins—a bitter, slow-moving fugue which Wagner called "the most melancholy thing in all music". Never was art less concerned with brilliance, ornament, or opulence of expression; never did it speak more profoundly from a medium so compressed and austere.

For a long time these last quartets remained so many enigmas. In some respects they defied laws which had come to seem as fundamental as those of nature: e.g. the C sharp minor Quartet, instead of having the usual four movements, had seven, and they were to be played continuously. For the last movement of the B flat Quartet Beethoven originally wrote a fugue. But it was so complex and of such length that it dismayed those who first tried to play it. The publisher begged Beethoven to substitute another movement for it, which he finally did. The so-called "Grand Fugue" now stands alone, a work of exhausting size and content, clearly too big for its medium.

About all five quartets there clings to this day a certain strangeness. No longer disquieting, they are rather infinitely fascinating, for they hold something of the unearthly distortion which elongated the faces and bodies of El Greco's saints into an embodiment of spirituality and suffering. We now see within them in clear outline the end of the lifelong struggle of the composer against an enemy fate. He had lost that struggle, and he knew it. In the words of W. J. Henderson, "Fate was too strong for him, for she robbed him of the power to hear his own art. Tantalus standing in the midst of the waters of Hades and forbidden to drink was no more a tortured spirit than the failing Beethoven going down into the graveyard of a soundless old age." In these last quartets may be found both the iron courage and the pathos with which he bore that resolution of his destiny.

It was in the year 1826 that Beethoven's nephew Carl shot himself in the head in an attempt at suicide. The shock to the composer was a grievous one; later he was to feel the real sharpness of the serpent's tooth when the young man publicly stated that his uncle had tormented him to desperation. Meanwhile, Beethoven took him to his brother Johann's home in the town of Gneixendorf, to recuperate. The composer had aged terribly and his own health was bad, but that did not prevent him from working. At Gneixendorf he finished the last movement of the B flat Quartet, the one substituted for the fugue; he began a quintet, and there were other larger projects in his mind, including an opera, an oratorio, a Requiem, and a tenth symphony.

Early in December he returned to Vienna. On the journey, either from riding in an open wagon or sleeping in a draughty room in a cheap inn, he caught a cold. He was put to bed in his lodgings in Vienna, desperately ill from what the doctors called "inflammation of the lungs". He passed the first crisis, but then the doctors found evidence of jaundice, "hard nodules on the liver", and finally dropsy. There began a ghastly four-month struggle with death. The sick man's body swelled, and at times the pain was excruciating; but his sufferings served only to put him into violent rages, "mighty explosions of temper" which the doctors feared would carry him off. With the grotesque fumbling which then passed for medical science they gave him frozen punch to drink, put him in enervating sweat-baths, and tapped him four times for dropsy. As the water was drawn the composer remarked, "Better from my belly than from my pen."

On a day late in March it became evident that the end was near. He signed his will and received the last rites of the Church. To those at his bedside he murmured, "*Plaudite, amici, comedia finita est*" ["Applaud, friends, the comedy is ended"], and a few hours later he lapsed into a coma. Even yet the iron will was not broken; for two more days of unconsciousness the struggle went on. Then on March 26, 1827, there occurred a scene so melodramatic as to seem apocryphal, but it is well authenticated. It was late afternoon and snow lay on the ground outside. Suddenly the watchers at the side of the dying man were startled by a flash of lightning and a violent peal of thunder. Beethoven, who had been unconscious for hours, roused himself and opened his eyes; he even raised his clenched fist as if in a last gesture of defiance. Then he fell back, and the struggle was over.

# Schubert

1797-1828



In Heaven a spirit doth dwell  
"Whose heart-strings are a lute";  
None sing so wildly well  
As the angel Israfel.  
And the giddy stars (so legends tell)  
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell  
Of his voice, all mute.

EDGAR ALLAN POE (*Israfel*).

ON A WINTER DAY IN 1827, WHEN BEETHOVEN WAS ON HIS DEATH-BED, SOMEONE tried to beguile him by showing him a collection of songs in manuscript, written by a young Viennese named Franz Schubert. The sick man was told that these were only a portion of the thirty-year-old composer's output of more than five hundred songs, and a cascade of piano pieces, chamber works, symphonies, Masses, and operas. Beethoven was enthralled by the beauty and originality of the Schubert songs: "for several days he could not tear himself away from them; he passed many hours daily over 'Iphigenia', 'Grenzen der Menschheit', 'Die Allmacht', 'Die junge Nonne', 'Viola', the 'Müllerlieder', and others. He cried out several times with joyful enthusiasm: 'Truly in Schubert there is the divine spark.' . . ." Some time during the ensuing days the two men are supposed to have met. If they did, Beethoven looked from his death-bed upon his successor among the reigning monarchs of his art, the first and one of the greatest of all the composers of the coming romantic movement, and the most inspired melodist who ever lived.

Beethoven saw a young man of insignificant, almost ludicrous appearance. Schubert was five feet one in height, with a roly-poly figure and sloping shoulders. His face was round and pudgy, with thick lips and a short nose. Even his eyes, which shone with a clear brightness expressive of the man's inner spirituality, had to be marred by ugly spectacles.

His meeting with Beethoven fulfilled one of the dreams of Schubert's life. At the public funeral of his master he was one of those who carried torches before the coffin. After the ceremonies Schubert sat in a tavern with his friends. He proposed a solemn toast, "To him we have just buried"; and then, in a moment of sudden and melancholy prescience, another: "To him who will be next." They drank—to Franz Schubert himself; for within two years he too was dead.

The story of Schubert's life is one of human suffering which few who love his music may read without pangs of remorse. It is a story of divine creative gifts placed in one of the tenderest of hearts, gifts destroyed by poverty and illness, by disappointment, deferred hopes, and cruel neglect.

## II

The romantic movement, to which Franz Schubert contributed in such prodigal measure, was far more than an efflorescence of new ideas in the arts. It was a tide so strong that it burst the confines of the arts and flooded every corner of civilized man's activity. It affected morals and manners, politics, religion, even science. It passed from an inspiring idea in the minds of a few creative artists into a way of life for several generations of Europeans and Americans. The present age, which arose from its dead ashes, is too much inclined to view that movement with disdain. We are close enough to remember at first hand its decadent and overripe end, the exaggerations and absurdities of its Victorianism, and the tight-laced corsets of a preposterous conventionality in which the movement had at last become encased. It is well to remember that the beginnings of romanticism were far different from its end.

The movement gained impetus from the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, whose doctrine of naturalism was one of the two torches (the rationalism of Voltaire was the other) which set the fires of the French Revolution and ultimately burned down part of the eighteenth-century political system. Out of that conflagration came the ideal of freedom, equality, and the "rights of man"—a vast liberation of the human mind from ancient political and philosophical prisons.

Men of the arts were soon to take their cue from the statesmen and the sages. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the literary men especially were in rebellion against the dogmas of an outworn classicism. Down went the dusty walls of the Latin and Greek academicians, and the dry conventions which had kept creative minds in a closed garden. Out into the world the artist looked, free at last to choose for his uses any subject under the sun. Some of them turned to the past, and there began a re-creation of medieval history, celebrated in tales and ballads, novels and epic poems. In England the novels of Sir Walter Scott were a mixture of historical fact and poetic fancy, of love, adventure, and romance. E. T. A. Hoffman in Germany and Edgar Allan Poe in America produced tales of imagination and horror, grisly excursions into the fantastic and the nightmarish; the Brothers Grimm turned to simple fairy-tales and folklore. Some writers found inspiration in the beauty of nature and the simple life, others went down to the sea in ships. Cooper's theme was the struggle of a people against the wilderness and the savage; and later Herman Melville made a grandiloquent epic out of a man's revenge against a great whale.

Inevitably it was the emotion of love which motivated most of the new romancers, especially in England where Coleridge and Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Keats, Tennyson and Browning burned their passions at undreamed-of temperatures. Shelley shocked his country not alone by his wild conduct but by the searing intensity of his love poems; they were more frightening to a classic age than even the splendours of *Prometheus Unbound* or the violence of *The Mask of Anarchy*. In France it was with the novel that the romantic age reached one of its finest flowerings. Few other countries could rival the royal

line that included Stendhal, Mme de Staël, Dumas, Gautier, George Sand, Victor Hugo, and Balzac.

Germany had the most resplendent single figure of all, in the first flush of that age—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—who was poet, dramatist, philosopher, novelist, and one of the universal minds of his time. Goethe's long life (1749–1832) bridged the two ages of classicism and romanticism. He called himself a classicist, and at times he opposed the excesses of the romantic movement. Nevertheless, he was at once the sire and the midwife of that movement in Germany. As a young man in his twenties he had helped inaugurate the *Sturm und Drang*; his *Sorrows of Werther* filled the minds of half the young intellectuals of Germany with sentimental dreams of lovesickness, frustration, and suicide. His mature *Wilhelm Meister* became the model for countless romantic novelists, as his lyrics, ballads, and poetic dramas inspired the poets.

Goethe's life, his very self, was a romantic ideal. The lofty mind, serene and powerful, seemed to span the entire field of human knowledge—from the arts and philosophy to jurisprudence and medicine, from mysticism to occult philosophy, from the sciences of morphology and optics to astrology and alchemy. Handsome as a young god, born to the refinements and securities of life, he moved through an enlightened existence with deliberation and grace. He took the beauty of Italy in a stride; at Weimar he played the platonic role of philosopher-statesman. With true romantic disdain of commonplace moralities he had one love-affair after another, not omitting the scandal of an illegitimate son. Truly, "his life was his greatest work".

There was one of Goethe's creations which cut more deeply than any other into the romantic mind of the nineteenth century. That was his dramatic masterpiece, *Faust*. For almost sixty years first one and then the other of its two parts lay athwart his consciousness, struggling to be born. The work was an epitome of its author's own mind, with its churning of myriad ideas, its conflicts of philosophical thought. *Faust* became the great catalyst of its age, used by men in every other art to quicken their own imaginations.

Across the spectrum of romanticism, to which all the arts, the philosophies, the sciences, and even the personalities of individual men contributed, there appears one band of colour more resplendent than all the rest—the art of music. The men who created romantic music came upon the scene after Beethoven, a procession of geniuses, one upon the heels of another, not only from Germany but from neighbouring countries where sparks from the blaze of German music had begun to fall—Schubert, Berlioz, Schumann, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Liszt, Wagner, Verdi, Brahms, Mussorgsky, and Tchaikovsky. The work of all these men was originally made possible by Beethoven himself. He was like Goethe—the connecting link between the past and the future, a classicist whose work contained the germs from which the romantic ideas were to grow. The first truly romantic composer was Schubert.

### III

Franz Seraph Peter Schubert was born in a small suburb of Vienna on January 31, 1797, the son of a school-teacher and the grandson of a Moravian peasant. The family was almost as large as that of J. S. Bach; there were thirteen children by two wives. Franz was the twelfth child. His father had to contend with the struggle against poverty which is often the reward of member.

of his profession. He found time to become an amateur 'cellist, and his famous son's first music teacher.

As a child, Franz Schubert's talent was phenomenal. He picked up violin-playing from his father, piano-playing from an older brother, singing and harmony from a local choir-master. He amazed them all by an intuitive knowledge which gave him a grasp of a subject before he was taught. He began composition at the age of ten.

In 1808 he won an appointment to the Imperial Convict, a school which was to be his home for the next five years. This was one of those child prisons where, in return for their singing in a choir, the boys were boarded, lodged, and taught. The building was spare and cheerless; in winter the rooms were icy. The schoolmasters were often cruel to the point of sadism, and there was never quite enough to eat. There exists a letter written by Franz Schubert, when he was fifteen, to his brother Ferdinand. His request is a pathetic one. "You know from experience how sometimes one wants to eat a roll and a few apples, and all the more when after a modest dinner one can look forward to a wretched supper eight and a half hours later. This continually persistent wish troubles me more and more. . . . How would it be if you were to let me have a few kreutzers each month?"

Fortunately, there was the compensation of music at the Convict. The school orchestra was a good one, and at his post among the violins Schubert became acquainted with the easier works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Cherubini. At the age of twelve he was emotionally stirred by Mozart's G minor Symphony, saying that it shook him to the depths without his knowing why. Soon he began to compose in earnest. He was too poor to buy music paper, but an older boy in the school gave him the money and then he used up paper by the ream. One of his teachers reported, "The lad knows everything already; he has been taught by God."

By the time Schubert was sixteen he had written half a dozen string quartets, and just before he left the Convict, late in 1813, he finished his first symphony. The next year he attempted his first opera. From the top gallery of a Viennese opera house he had heard Cherubini's *Medea*, Spontini's *Vestale*, and Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In a few weeks he completed a long three-act work called *Des Teufels Lustschloss* (*The Devil's Pleasure Palace*). In later years he gave the rearranged manuscript of this opera to a friend, whose servants (in 1840) used the pages of the entire second act to light a fire.

After he left the Convict, Schubert was nearly drafted into the Austrian army. It was the year 1813 and the European headsman was once again stalking the land. Unless a man could buy his way out he faced a fourteen-year term in the service. School-teachers were exempt, so Schubert took the easiest way and became an assistant teacher in his father's school. There he spent three years of drudgery at a business he loathed. Every moment that he could spare went into composition, and soon his production of music became nothing less than prodigious. Music seemed to pour from his pen with artesian abundance and without effort. Songs occupied him chiefly. In the two years between 1814 and 1816 he composed about two hundred and fifty. He wrote as many as eight in a single day. "When I finish one," he said simply, "I begin another."

Mozart's fluent command of the mechanics of composition is often quoted as the antithesis of Beethoven's agonized labour pains, but in some respects Schubert's genius was even more spontaneous than Mozart's. It was more than

a facility; it amounted almost to a frenzy. A friend who knew him well said that his music "comes forth to the world in a state of clairvoyance or somnambulism, without any free will on the part of the composer, the forced product of a higher power and inspiration. . . ."

The wonder of Schubert's genius was that his facility was geared even in his youth to superb creative ideas. One of his songs of his seventeenth year is "Gretchen am Spinnrade" ["Margaret at the Spinning-wheel"], from Goethe's *Faust*. It is his first masterpiece. It is also the beginning of a new phase in music—the modern German *lied*. The poet's verses depict Margaret seated at her spinning-wheel, her mind obsessed with longing for her lover. The first experiences of passion have ensnared and bewildered the unfortunate girl. Thoughts of the handsome man, the touch of his hand, of his lips, set her head reeling with desire; she is sick with the wish to die in his arms.

The vividness with which Schubert translated this scene, with all its emotional and psychological implications, makes this song a prime example of art compressed into small means. Margaret's plaint is heard over a whirring accompaniment descriptive of the wheel. Through the entire song this figure continues, changing only with the shifting harmonies which seem to rise higher and higher into strange exciting keys as the girl's agitation increases. Only once does the throbbing wheel stop, when she becomes almost hysterical with thoughts of her lover's kiss—and for an instant even the involuntary motion of her foot on the treadle ceases.

Late the next year (1815) two of his friends came to Schubert's lodgings and found him pacing the floor, reading aloud Goethe's ballad, *Erlkönig* (*The Erl King*). The composer was "in a state bordering on frenzy". He had no piano, but he seated himself at a table and "in the shortest possible time the splendid ballad was on paper". He had created one of the world's greatest songs. Goethe's poem is in every way worthy of its setting. It has a wildly dramatic beauty and a moving pathos that constitute balladry at its finest. It is the story of a father who rides through the night and the storm, clasping his child in his arms. The frightened boy imagines that the Erl King is following them, trying to lure him away. His father comforts him, but soon the voice becomes threatening and the boy cries out in terror that the Erl King has seized him. The father spurs on his horse until, trembling and exhausted, he reaches his home. But the child in his arms is dead.

Schubert's song is again a masterpiece of vividness and economy. The dramatic ride through the wild countryside, the eerie voice of the Erl King, the pleading of the child and his father's attempts to calm his fears, the desperate dash for home, and the heartrending end—every implication of the words is painted in music. The pounding gallop of the horse's hoofs seems to continue without a break, until the last three bars; yet over that urgent pulse are heard four contrasting voices—the boy, the Erl King, the father, and the poet himself describing the scene. The boy's is high-pitched and hysterical, the father's is low, the Erl King's barely whispered. These shifts in registration and personality are achieved through a series of smoothly wrought modulations, which also serve to increase the excitement of the scene by moving higher and higher through a variety of major and minor keys.

If "Erlkönig" were not in every respect a great song it would still be a landmark in music by reason of its harmonic scheme. Boldly the young composer set key against key with the daring of a painter placing unrelated tints together, yet fusing them so that they flow one into the other with liquid smoothness.



The result was a richness of colouring that was rarely found in the music of the eighteenth century. It was one of the first manifestations of a metamorphosis in the science of harmony which was to bring about, under the hands of Schubert, Chopin, Liszt, and above all Wagner, a complete change in the face of modern music.

## IV

It is now accepted as a practical truism that the song as a modern art form begins with Schubert. There is more accident than mystery in the fact that this appealing branch of the music art should have bloomed so late, and that so many of the masters of music before Schubert (particularly the Germans) should have ignored it. Because of its primitive origins and its kinship with folk music, the song was disdained by early composers of serious music, whose energies were bent instead upon church music, and upon the development of more complex, and hence to them more interesting, forms.

There were a few isolated attempts by important composers to make art out of the song. The Great English lutanist of the early seventeenth century, John Dowland, sang and accompanied himself on the lute in a virtuoso manner, and with notable public success. He published four volumes of his songs with sute accompaniment. An Italian contemporary of Dowland's, Giulio Caccini, also published (in 1601) a collection of songs for the lute, in a book famous among musicologists, *Le Nuove Musiche*. In his preface Caccini claimed to be the inventor of songs "for a single voice to the accompaniment of a single instrument".

Bach wrote but a handful of secular songs. His inspiration (apart from the purely abstract forms) came almost entirely from liturgical works. Handel's reservoir of melodic ideas was poured into operas and oratorios. Haydn's lifework was the development of the symphonic orchestra and the string quartet. Even Mozart, the most versatile of all composers, wrote but thirty-four songs, the merest drop in the bucket of his output.

Mozart did, however, make one noteworthy contribution to the art of the song. By this time there had grown up in Germany two general types of serious songs, a division which exists to this day. The first was the *Volksthümliches Lied*, the simpler type based on the folk song, in which the same melody was used for each stanza of the poem. The second was a more sophisticated type, the *Durchcomponiertes Lied* (meaning, literally, "composed through"), in which the melody paid no attention to the form of the poem, stanza, or otherwise, but varied itself with complete freedom in order to mirror the thoughts expressed by the words. In 1785, Mozart set to music a short poem by Goethe, "Das Veilchen" ["The Little Violet"], and this is generally regarded as the first perfect example of the *Durchcomponiertes Lied*. All the implications of the words, both pictorial and emotional, are expressed with fidelity in Mozart's music.

With "Das Veilchen" the modern art song begins at last to put forth the tender leaves of hope. Beethoven unquestionably helped its growth. He wrote many songs, and the very fact that a composer of his eminence took an interest in the form was enough to give it a needed dignity. But Beethoven was not really the man to do it complete justice. Words were an obstacle instead of an inspiration to him. What the song as a serious form needed was a composer whose ear was attuned to the golden ring of great poetry, a man who

could feel profoundly the pure beauty of words. Beethoven was not such a man, nor was Mozart, nor Haydn. But young Franz Schubert was.

He was one of the most sentimental of young men. An unprepossessing appearance had made him shy, turning his mind inward upon itself. He was filled with the wonderful introspections of youth, the dreams, the vague yearnings. A joyful experience or the contemplation of sorrow gave him the same sharp, exquisite pangs. "All my life," he wrote at nineteen, "I shall remember this fine, clear, lovely day." He would walk in the fields at the end of a hot summer afternoon; "in the mysterious twilight . . . I felt so happy and at peace. How lovely! I thought, and cried aloud, and stood there enchanted." The sight of a churchyard reminded him of his dead mother; he was filled with melancholy at the sound of bells tolling. Above all else it was poetry which enthralled him. His ecstasy over Goethe's *Erlkönig* has been described. It was not by any means unusual.

There is the greatest unevenness in the words to the Schubert songs. They range from the best of Goethe and Schiller and Shakespeare to potboilers, on an aesthetic level with the words of the modern popular tune. This does not prove, however, that the composer himself was lacking in taste. It is more likely that he used the poorer samples along with the best simply because they were the only ones available to him. Books in his age were still a luxury; such a thing as a good moderately priced anthology of verse was unknown. Much of the time he was so poor that he could not buy music paper, much less books. When he could not get good poems he used poor ones, and when he could get neither he reset poems he had already used. In his lifetime Schubert wrote more than six hundred songs; some two hundred (or about one third) are repetitions of lyrics previously used. Of Goethe's famous poem, *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt*, he made no less than six different versions, over a period of a dozen years. Sometimes his repetitions include no more than slight corrections of the original, but many times the later version is an utterly different treatment. That he knew good poetry from bad is proved by the Goethe songs. He wrote seventy-one songs to fifty-nine of Goethe's lyrics, and their general excellence is unsurpassed in the entire catalogue of his vocal works.

## V

To discover precisely what Schubert did for the song as an art form it is necessary to go no further than his so-called "song years", from 1815 to 1817, when hundreds of songs fell from his pen in a spring freshet of abundance. He was in his eighteenth and nineteenth years, an age when Beethoven had produced nothing of value, Bach a chorale prelude or two of distinction, and even Mozart a huge pile of music characterized by fine workmanship but little originality. What Schubert created as a mere youth was literally one of the miracles of art. Among these hundreds of songs are many of the finest that he or anyone else ever wrote. They include, besides "Gretchen am Spinnrade" and "Erlkönig" almost thirty other of his great Goethe songs, among them "Heidenröslein", "Wanderers Nachtleid", "Rastlose Liebe", "Erster Verlust", and a group based on verses from *Wilhelm Meister*. Here also are "Der Tod und das Mädchen", "An der Mond", "Memnon", "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus", "An Schwager Kronos", "Ganymed", "An die Musik", and "Der Wanderer".

In spite of their creator's youth these songs bear not the slightest trace of

immaturity; but instead a wealth of melodic and harmonic beauty, originality, subtlety, exquisite workmanship, and an unerring sense of musical translation. Schubert could already project in tone not alone the dramatic feeling, atmosphere, and emotion of the poems as a whole, but the niceties of thought contained in single words. To appreciate his accomplishment one need take but a sheaf of half a dozen of the best of these songs, almost at random, and then take note of the enormous span of creative thought which they bridge.

"An der Mond" ["To the Moon"] and "An die Musik" ["To Music"] are essays in pure melody. The former is a lovely night piece, tinted with the pale greys and silver of moonlight. It unfolds two melodies of piercing sweetness, clearly anticipating the nocturnes of Chopin. "An die Musik" is the composer's hymn of joy to his own art, which has sustained him in his hours of gloom and carried him heavenward on the wings of inspiration. The melody has the uplifting beauty of a prayer of thanksgiving.

"Heidenröslein" is a little melody after Goethe's famous poem. The words are artlessly naive, recalling the verses of Burns. A boy spies a wild rose growing on a hedge, and is captivated by her morning freshness. He tries to seize her, and is stabbed by her thorns. The union of charming words and an adorable melody have made this song one of the most beloved ever written. As a point of contrast it is interesting to turn to a song written two years later (in 1817), the celebrated "Der Tod und das Mädchen" ["Death and the Maiden"]. Here is simplicity, too, and brevity, but of an entirely different order. The words are a mere fragment of dialogue, in which a young girl begs Death to pass her by. "I am still young!" she cries, and Death is filled with compassion for his victim. In a monotone that hardly rises above a whisper he calms her fears. He is not wild or gruesome, nor has he come to frighten or to punish. His errand is the merciful blessing of sleep. Here is a case where the composer's genius lay in what he omitted. He needed only a handful of bars, two themes of utmost simplicity, and an accompaniment that is a model of restraint; yet with these few means the macabre idea grips the imagination. The composer himself was haunted for years by the solemn theme which is the voice of Death. A decade later he used it for the Variations in his Quartet in D Minor.

"Rastose Liebe" ["Restless Love"] is a passionate and fiery love song. The words were a memento of Goethe's youthful adoration of Charlotte von Stein, one of his numerous innamoratas. The wild ecstasy of love has swept the poet's life like a storm, giving him no respite from its blissful torments. How can he escape from the love that is at once the agony and the crown of his life? Schubert set this lyric to music when he was eighteen years old, the same year that he wrote "Erlkönig". The song was also a product of one of his clairvoyant states, when he was so moved by the verse that the music came to him in one blinding flash of inspiration. This moment in which "Rastose Liebe" was born was so vivid that he remembered it for years afterwards and spoke of it himself with astonishment.

Among the flood of songs of Schubert's nineteenth year is one of his most famous works—the lordly "Wanderer". The poetic idea is typical of the German sentimentality of the time. A homeless one has wandered, careworn and heartsick, searching for the land of his desire. But always that country of green fields and rose blooms has eluded him; to his sighs of "Where? where?" a voice within him answers, "'Tis always there, where thou art not." The opening bars of this song have the solemn grandeur of a tragic drama. The piece does not sustain that lofty exordium, and its middle section borders on

the commonplace; but in capable hands it still can be made to project a lofty emotion.

"Gruppe aus dem Tartarus" ["Group from Tartarus"] is an inferno in tone. The words are Schiller's. We descend into Hades, an abyss of horror in which the wail and shriek of the damned fill our ears. Upon the banks of Cocytus stand a desperate company, their brows knotted with anguish, their hollow eyes staring at an approaching ship. Is it to be deliverance at last from an eternity of pain? Schubert patterned his music from the chaos of the frightful scene, basing it on unrelated harmonies that move chromatically up and down the scale, filling it with clashing discords and grating dissonances. What the composer's contemporaries thought of this song we can only guess; nothing like it had ever been heard before. But its chromaticism and its discord, its dramatic furies, were not forgotten. They were to echo again, decades later, all through the music of Wagner, Liszt, Strauss, and their contemporaries.

From the above half-dozen examples, chosen from his several hundred, it is possible to gauge what Schubert accomplished with the song. Relatively speaking, it hardly existed in his time; with one stroke he created it and almost exhausted its possibilities. All his finer songs had important implications for the future. There were two main forcing-beds from which the romantic movement in music blossomed: one was the music of Beethoven, the other the songs of Schubert.

The crux of the romantic movement was a new connection between music and purely literary ideas. Nearly every exemplar of romanticism, from Schubert to Richard Strauss, lived in a creative atmosphere saturated with ideas borrowed from literature. These men took the abstract forms of the eighteenth century and revived them by crossing them with poetry, legend, drama, folklore, religion, and even philosophy. Schumann made his piano music the mirror of a picturesque array of literary fancies; Berlioz took the pure abstraction of the symphony and gave it a programme; Liszt created the tone poem; Wagner changed opera into music drama, in which the play was given at least a theoretical rank of importance with the music. The basic impulse of all these manifestations can be found in the songs of Franz Schubert.

No one need expatiate at this late date on the genius of Schubert as a melodist. It was one of the most astounding gifts ever bestowed upon a creative musician, worthy of rank with Beethoven's powers of thematic development and Bach's command of polyphony. In Schubert's songs it flowered with junglelike profusion. Moreover, the Schubert melodies are not only abundant but characteristic; we can recognize them instantly as his. They can be sweet, exquisite, tender, lovely, melancholy—and yet they never cloy. They can be noble to the point of sublimity, and without the slightest trace of strain. One fact about the Schubert melodies, however, too often goes unnoted: they were supported by the composer's almost equal gift for harmonization. Here Schubert made another lasting contribution to the science of music. Before him no composer had made such extensive use of key changes for contrast and colour. Modulation was a technical tool which had lain long neglected. In part this was due to the limitations of the early keyboard instruments whose system of tuning did not permit modulations to remote keys, until after J. S. Bach helped unchain them with his "Well-Tempered Clavier". Bach himself clearly touched upon the new field which lay open for composers in the emotional richness offered by key contrasts, but in the fifty years following his death his music was too little known for the harmonic hints he threw out to have any effect whatever. Of the

later eighteenth-century composers only Mozart seemed to sense the value of extensive key contrasts, and he died before he could move very far in that direction.

Schubert was the first composer with a modern feeling for harmonic freedom. He seemed to have divined the open sesame of diatonic modulation; he could move from key to key almost at will. As a result his harmonic schemes are so rich in colour contrasts that they make the works of his late eighteenth-century predecessors seem washed out and plain. The effect, in music history, is like passing from the view of pictures in black and white to the splendour of stained-glass windows.

One other technical feature of the Schubert songs should not pass unnoted—the variety and range of their accompaniment material. Schubert seldom found it necessary to fall back upon the thin-worn clichés of his predecessors, in which the accompaniment sounded as if the composer considered material which supported a voice to be either a stepchild or a crutch. Every poem seemed to suggest to Schubert some new treatment of the piano part. Often it becomes almost symphonic in texture; invariably its role in expounding the idea, painting the scene, and arousing the emotion of the poem is hardly secondary to that of the voice itself.

## VI

When he was twenty years old Schubert could stand school-teaching no longer. He wanted to devote his life to music. The idea was long opposed by his father, who knew what misery lay in store for a musician as impractical and retiring as his son. But young Schubert was not to be swayed, and he gave up his position at the school. From there on his life was like a boat cast adrift. He had no money and no income, except an occasional pittance from music lessons or the sale of a song. How he managed to exist during the next ten years remains a mystery. Most of the time he lived off his friends.

There had grown up around him a group of young intellectuals, some of whom had been his fellow students at the Convict. They were bohemians of a sort—writers, painters, actors, and musicians. They met in the genial atmosphere of the Viennese taverns. Schubert was one of the leading spirits, and he seems to have been particularly admired and beloved. Inevitably many of them had poetic ambitions, and Schubert set numerous examples of their efforts at verse to music. One of the group was Josef von Spaun, who as a boy in the Convict had given Schubert money to buy music paper. Another lifelong friend was Franz von Schober, a wealthy and cultured young Swede whose passion for a romantic life led him to write and draw, and even to emulate Wilhelm Meister by acting in a travelling company. Schubert lived with him for long periods of time, repaying him for his generosity by setting twelve of Schober's poems to music and making an opera out of one of his librettos.

Some of Schubert's most successful collaborations were with a man named Johann Mayrhofer, who made his living as a book censor. Mayrhofer was a neurotic, morbid individual, tortured by ill-health and spells of melancholia. Though not a great poet, he stood above the rest of the group. Schubert made forty-seven of his verses into songs. The two young men lived together for two years, in lodgings as squalid as a tenement. The composer rose every day at six and worked the entire morning, until the table and floor were covered

with sheets of music paper. The two men got along well and Schubert's good nature helped the poet out of his slough of despond. But a few years after Schubert's death Mayrhofer committed suicide by throwing himself out of a window.

One of Schubert's warmest admirers was Michael Vogl, who was a famous operatic star of the time. As a schoolboy Schubert had heard him sing at the Viennese opera houses. Vogl was fabulously endowed for his profession, with a glorious baritone voice, a gift for dramatic acting, a Hollywood face and figure, and a brain. In his dressing-room he read the works of Plato, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Thomas à Kempis. One day Schober brought him to meet Schubert and to hear some of the young composer's songs. At first Vogl was unmoved. He glanced over "Augenlied", "Memnon", and "Ganymed", and put them aside, puzzled both by the unusual nature of the songs and the insignificant appearance of the shy little man who had created them. He said to Schubert, "There's something in you, but you're too little of an actor or a charlatan." Vogl went away; but before long he was back, unable to shake off the strange fascination of these remarkable songs. Soon he became an ardent Schubert champion and the first important artist to sing his songs in public. He introduced "Erlkönig" to the world at a public concert in Vienna, in 1821.

On several occasions Vogl took the composer with him on summer trips to neighbouring Austrian towns. The actor's generosity gave Schubert an opportunity to enjoy the countryside and his first glimpses of mountain scenery, and it probably saved him from starvation. On another occasion (in the spring of 1818, when he was twenty-one) Schubert's friends had to come to his rescue by securing for him a position as music teacher to the two young daughters of Count Johann Esterhazy. The composer spent the summer and autumn months at the Esterhazy country estate in Zseliz. His teaching duties were not arduous, he had ample time to compose, and his surroundings were pleasant. In his letters he spoke well of the Esterhazys, but remarked, "I have been spared any invitation to the dining-room." He lived and associated only with the servants—the coachmen, the chef, the nurse, and the chambermaid. The proud soul of a Beethoven would have exploded in wrath, but Schubert did not seem to care.

After the Zseliz interlude the composer returned to Vienna, to share the lodgings of Mayrhofer. The fact that his personal life was disorganized and his income practically nil seemed to have no effect whatever upon his work. He could compose anywhere, any time, for hours at a stretch if he were lucky enough to find solitude; if not, while carrying on conversations with friends, and even at the tables of noisy taverns. The works poured out in an endless stream—songs by the hundreds, symphonies, chamber works, piano pieces, overtures, Masses, operas, and operettas. Very little of this mass of work ever saw the light of publication during Schubert's lifetime. The music publishers paid almost no attention to him; when they did buy an occasional piece it was for sums that were criminally small—often as little as a gulden (about tenpence) per song. Schubert did not seem to care what happened to his music. He gave away many of his manuscripts. It is fortunate that one of his admirers, Josef Hüttenbrenner, became a self-appointed librarian for Schubert, collecting and preserving his manuscripts, and even recovering many which had either been given away or simply taken by chance acquaintances.

Some of Schubert's friends tried hard to bring his works, notably his songs, before the public. In 1821 they commissioned a publisher, Diabelli, to issue at their expense Schubert's Opus I, which consisted of "Erlkönig". In the

ensuing year some twenty of his early songs were issued privately. His friends also persuaded the composer to send to Goethe copies of the songs in which he had set the poet's verses to music. They were hoping for a testimonial from the great man which would impress the public and the publishers. Goethe never replied. Josef von Spaun sent a copy of "Erlkönig" to the publishing firm of Breitkopf and Härtel, who became suspicious rather than interested. It happened that in Dicsden there were two other Franz Schuberts, a father and son, who were well-known violinists. The publishers sent the song to the elder Schubert, who in reply delivered himself of an historic piece of unconscious humour: "The cantata 'Erlkönig' is not my composition, but I shall certainly do my best to find out the fellow who sent you this piece of claptrap and is guilty of misusing my name." Thereafter Breitkopf and Härtel maintained a dignified silence and did not even reply to Spaun. The firm of Peters, in Leipzig, did at least send an answer to Josef Hüttenbrenner when he tried to interest them in Schubert's manuscripts. They made it plain that they wanted only "works by masters already recognized by the public".

Much of Schubert's time at this period was taken up by his persistent attempts to write operas. Today no one except a few musicologists thinks of Schubert as an operatic composer, so completely are these works forgotten. Beginning with his earliest effort at the age of seventeen, *Des Teufels Lustschloss*, he wrote no less than eighteen works for the stage. Some of these were never completed and exist only as sketches or fragments; others are lost. Not one of them ever succeeded. It is a melancholy fact that these hundreds upon hundreds of pages, by one of the world's supreme musical geniuses, represent today only so many pages of dry and dusty failure. Several of his operas were produced in Vienna through the sponsorship of his friends while Schubert was yet alive; one even had the benefit of Michael Vogl's presence in the leading role. On this occasion Schubert was present in the gallery, but he ran out of the theatre rather than be called before the curtain in his shabby clothes. None of the operas ever received more than a few performances.

Modern attempts to revive and reconstruct the Schubert operas have always revealed the same fundamental defects. A few of the librettos are good; but the others are poor efforts in a field where ineptitude is taken as a matter of course. In spite of his lyric sense and his genius for translating into music the emotion and drama of words, Schubert had only a weakly developed sense of stage situations and of theatrical conventions. Even so, it seems paradoxical that the man who could create superb miniature music dramas out of the handful of words of "Erlkönig" or "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus" should have failed so completely at larger projections of dramatic thought.

## VII

In the autumn of 1823 Schubert received notification that he had been elected an honorary member of a music society in the town of Graz. In his reply he promised to send the society a score of one of his symphonies as a token of his gratitude. A year went by before he finally delivered the pages of two movements of a symphony in B minor to Josef Hüttenbrenner, who passed them on to his brother Anselm, an officer in the Graz music society. Anselm then did a curious thing. He stored the manuscript away and said nothing about it to anyone. He kept it for more than forty years. Finally, in 1860, his brother

happened to mention its existence to a conductor named Herbeck. This man persuaded Anselm Hüttenbrenner to give him the manuscript, and he produced the work for the first time, in Vienna, on December 17, 1865. Thus one of the most celebrated works in the whole literature of music—the “Unfinished” Symphony—was at last given to the world. By that time Schubert had been dead for thirty-seven years.

The manuscript of the “Unfinished” bears the date October 30, 1822, indicating that Schubert was only twenty-five years old when he composed a work which comes as near to claiming the attributes of aesthetic perfection as anything yet created in the music art. It was his eighth attempt at the symphonic form. Unlike Beethoven, who waited until he was thirty, Schubert had followed Mozart in plunging into these musical deeps while yet an adolescent. His first symphony was written when he was sixteen and still a pupil at the Convict; he wrote five more before he was twenty-one.

For the most part these early Schubert symphonies are typical late eighteenth-century products. Even though the composer had heard most of the eight symphonies which Beethoven had then written, he was not sufficiently impressed by them to attempt any imitations. As a youth he had disliked Beethoven’s “revolutionary” style. His lack of creative daring is curious. At this time he was pioneering with all sorts of new ideas in his songs, but very few of these ideas creep into his early symphonies. Instead it is the impress of Mozart which is felt constantly—the elegance and grace, the insistence upon symmetry and formal balance. At times one might easily mistake them for works of Mozart; except when there appears in the melodies a certain mellow richness, and in the harmonies an unexpected brilliance of colouring, through which we recognize instantly the hand of Schubert.

In 1821 Schubert made elaborate sketches for a seventh symphony, in E major. He never finished it, even though he got enough of it on paper to permit several modern musicians to attempt reconstructions of it. The next year he tried another, but once again the effort was laid aside in an uncompleted state. This was the so-called “Unfinished” Symphony in B minor which he sent to Graz; and fortunately the composer did not follow the sketchy procedure by which he had laid out the rough general plan of the E major Symphony without filling in the details. The first two movements of the B minor Symphony are complete down to the last note. The composer dropped the work after sketching a hundred and thirty bars of a third movement.

The very opening bars of the “Unfinished” indicate what a remarkable advance Schubert had made over the comparatively pallid style of his previous symphonies. He was no longer imitating; he had struck a style of his own. There is a quality of grandeur and tragic solemnity in the first movement of the “Unfinished” Symphony which is lacking in his early symphonic efforts. For this purpose Schubert borrowed certain elements of dramatic structure and style from Beethoven, but he invested them with ideas of his own. He succeeded at last in finding expression within the symphonic framework for his own especial gift—beautiful melody supported by enriching harmonies. The “Unfinished” Symphony is one long procession of superb melodic ideas, one more inspired than the next, coloured by some of the most exquisite harmonic hues ever devised. The orchestration is in every way equal to the material it illuminates. In the second movement there is a use of solo woodwinds lovely beyond description. For a time the music seems to lose contact with life; it becomes unearthly, spiritual, angelic.



Why Schubert abandoned this masterpiece as he did remains a mystery. It seems inconceivable that it would be a matter of indifference to him if a work of such magnitude remained truncated. He obviously broke off his third movement because it lacked the inspiration of the first two; possibly there were other attempts at completion which failed the same way. The composer's problem was made especially difficult by the mood which binds the first two movements together—a gentle sadness which pervades not only the minor modes of the first but, by some unexplained alchemy, the major modes of the second. To continue that mood through two more movements would have been out of the question. The problem was to create another mood which would end the work and yet harmonize with what had gone before. Even Schubert, with all his fund of inspirational material, could not find it. It is likely that he came then to the same realization that the listener does who has heard many performances of this symphony: that the work is not unfinished at all. To have gone on, merely for the sake of obeying one of the laws of musical structure, might have meant detracting from the supreme beauty of what had already been accomplished. In a symphony every movement exists both for its own special virtues and for the beauty of contrast, of dramatic emphasis, of unified style which it sheds upon all the other movements. If a composer of Schubert's greatness could find nothing to say beyond the two movements of his "Unfinished" Symphony then we may be certain that the work was, in every aesthetic sense, complete.

## VIII

Shortly after the composition of the "Unfinished" Symphony Schubert became ill. Modern biographers, sifting the meagre evidence, have decided that he must have contracted a venereal disease. He was taken to a hospital in Vienna; his hair fell out and for a time he had to wear a wig. During the following year he was plunged into terrible despondency. One after another his operas had failed; his songs were making headway in popular favour, but he had foolishly sold certain of their publication rights for almost nothing. For almost ten years he had known little else than poverty and the charity of his friends. And now, with all his privations, he was sick. "Picture to yourself," he wrote, "a man whose brightest hopes have come to nothing, to whom the joy of love and friendship is but anguish, whose inspiration for the beautiful threatens to fail, and then ask yourself if such a man is not miserable and unhappy. . . . Every night when I go to sleep I hope never to wake again."

The ultimate wreckage of Schubert's life and of his immeasurable talent was so tragic a set of circumstances that writers have too often fallen into erroneous generalizations about its basic causes. Since art began there have been artists who lived and practised in comfort or even luxury, and others who starved. The precise economic value of the artist and his work is a problem which no age has ever solved. A case like that of Schubert was so glaring that we are apt to look back upon it over the range of years and assign wrong reasons for its happening—to assume that he suffered because the people of his time must have been indifferent to music, or that there was a wholesale lack of appreciation of art and the problems of the artist.

It was not the people of Schubert's time but the economy which was out of joint. He had the misfortune to be born into one of the catastrophes of modern history—the Napoleonic wars. He reached manhood in the decade after

Waterloo, a time when Europe was floundering in a morass of woe. Millions of lives had been destroyed or ruined; commerce was paralysed. Peasants and workers who were not driven to starvation by the ruination of the old economy were being caught in the wheels of the new industrial system. Misery was spread over the whole face of Europe, and with it a corroding despondency. The blazing light of revolutionary hope had gone out; Bonaparte had been beaten at vast cost of blood and treasure, only to return the Bourbons to the seats of power. It was no accident that in 1818 Schopenhauer published *The World as Will and Idea*, a work of philosophy ridden with pessimism as by a disease.

In the midst of these depressed times musicians like Franz Schubert suffered a double calamity. A few years before they had been living under the patronage system. For all its meanness, that system had at least kept many of them alive. Now great social and political storms had swept it away, but as yet nothing had been devised to take its place. The artist had won his social freedom, but years would pass before new economic machinery could be set up to make him even moderately self-sufficient. That machinery would take the form of the public concert, widespread music-publishing enterprises, with royalty payments and the protection of copyrights. But in Schubert's time these existed only in embryo.

In a world like that after Waterloo the first demand for any man is the tough armour of self-preservation. It is one of the enigmas of human life that a man like Schubert, so laden with genius, should have been sent into the world practically defenceless. The help of his friends was not enough. He needed a patron; he needed a wife. It would not have been too much to ask for Schubert a woman like Catherine, the wife of William Blake, whose life was a slavish dedication to the service of her husband's art. But Schubert never married. His reticence constituted a barrier which he never got over. There were women in his life, but next to nothing is known of his relationships with them.

In recent years there have been musical-comedy versions of Schubert's life, with various romantic episodes embroidered into the plot. These episodes are as specious as the popularized adaptations of his music are vulgar. The most we know is that when he was seventeen he fell in love, for the first time, with a girl named Theresa Grob whose family lived near the Schuberts in Vienna. She had a lovely voice, and Schubert some years later said that she was "not beautiful and had pockmarks on her face", but she was "good—good to the heart". He admitted that he had loved her deeply, but he had no prospects whatever, so her family persuaded her to marry a well-to-do baker.

When he was twenty-four Schubert spent a second summer with the Esterhazys at Zseliz. The Count's younger daughter Caroline was now seventeen, and some biographers believe that the young composer fell in love with his pupil. The evidence is slight. She once reproached him for not having dedicated any of his music to her; he replied, "Why should I, when everything I ever did is dedicated to you?" This may have been simply a gracefully extravagant compliment. If it was more than that, the composer must have known that his love for a woman so far above his rank was hopeless.

In the summer of 1823, at the time of his worst mental anguish, Schubert produced one of his most famous vocal works—the richly sentimental song cycle, "Die Schöne Müllerin" ["The Beautiful Maid of the Mill"]. The composer happened to pick up a small volume of verses, the *Müllerlieder*, by Wilhelm Müller, an obscure young professor at Dessau. Müller was a minor poet who

wrote verses full of sentimentality and artificial melancholy, in which mills, streams, and other rustic scenes were the background for lovesick youths in the throes of unrequited love. The *Müllerlieder* recount the love of a wandering young apprentice miller for a miller's fair daughter. The idyll is shattered by a green-clad hunter who captures the maid's heart. The despairing youth seeks death in the millstream.

Schubert was instantly taken with the possibilities of the Müller poems, and from them he created a cycle of twenty songs. In themselves, the *Müllerlieder* are hardly more than a collection of inoffensive valentines. But in Schubert's settings they become as authentic in their representation of simple rustic beauty as the verses of Burns; their sentiments seem as deeply felt as those of Housman.

In spite of the doleful end of the story (and the fact that the composer was in the hospital part of the time while he composed them) the Mill songs contain some of the most exuberantly happy music that Schubert ever wrote. The first pieces of the cycle especially are full of the wild ardour of young love. Spring is in the heart of the youthful miller; it sings from the rushing brook and from the roar of the flashing millwheel; it floods the scene like May sunshine streaming through green branches. Schubert made some of these songs almost folklike in their simplicity; they wear the mask of peasant innocence. But theirs is a case of art which conceals art. They are full of felicities of melody and style which have not worn thin in more than a century of performance.

## IX

It has long been one of the clichés of music criticism to say that Schubert could not write successfully in the larger forms. The notion still persists that he was incapable of anything but a kind of spontaneous composition. He has even been regarded as a wonderful simpleton who had no control whatever over the inspirational geyser which spouted from his brain. It is supposed that when he did try to guide this fount of ideas into the larger areas of design his work became diffuse, sprawling, and lopsided. Under this theory works like his "Unfinished" Symphony and the C major Symphony, his great D minor Quartet, are regarded as accidents—as exceptions which do not disprove the general rule.

No absolute denial can be made of these criticisms of Schubert's work, for the reason that some of them are true. At times he was a careless craftsman, taking the line of least resistance, filling up his reams of music paper with notes not too scrupulously conditioned by self-criticism. Like many another genius, he often relied on his natural mastery to lend somehow a light of distinction to a conventional idea. This is not a method by which great symphonies or sonatas are made. They do not fly from the brain full-born, the way dozens of Schubert's songs did. Theirs is an architecture which requires the constant union of inspiration and the coldest, hardest reasoning. Individual ideas cannot be permitted to develop as they will, but must be hewn and whittled and shaped to fit into some larger, all-embracing design. It is true that Schubert once expressed impatience with Beethoven's back-breaking struggles for this type of formal perfection. But that he was congenitally incapable of aesthetic discipline, that he did not ultimately learn how to marshal and organize and bring into focus his inspirational matter on to the larger panoramas of musical form—that is a theory which the plain facts of his accomplishment disprove.

It is undoubtedly his piano music which has given most credence to a dis-



*[Underwood-Stratton]*

FRANZ SCHUBERT

The composer at the age of sixteen, drawn by his friend Leopold Kupelwieser.



FELIX MENDELSSOHN  
After Magnus

[Rischgitz Studios]

paraging view of Schubert's work as a whole. His smaller pieces contain some of the loveliest music he ever wrote, while the larger ones are noteworthy for their mixture of good and bad. The short pieces include the famous "Impromptus" and "Moments Musicaux", miniatures which were written late in the composer's life. They introduced a brand-new idea into piano music: the brief one-movement piece, poetic in mood and songlike in melodic style. Schubert simply transplanted the song idea to the piano, and thus he was the father of the "Song without Words" and that vast progeny of piano pieces in similar vein with which the later nineteenth century was overrun. Being so close to the basic style of the song, it is obvious that here Schubert could not fail. In the "Moments Musicaux" especially his touch is unerring and exquisite.

The larger works—that is, the sonatas and the "Wanderer" Fantasia in C major—are problematical. For more than a century pianists neglected them. They were generally dismissed as garrulous and diffuse, as a hodge-podge of many loosely-strung-together melodies instead of the logical development of a few. In recent years a few pianists, tiring of benumbing repetitions of a few sonatas by Beethoven and Chopin, have tried out some of these by Schubert—and with surprising results. They turn out to be far better works than was long suspected.

Their defects should be admitted at once. Hardly one can be described as a well-rounded work throughout. There is always at least one movement that strings itself out to unconscionable lengths or, instead of developing, disintegrates into endless variations. Schubert repeats himself too much, both melodically and rhythmically, a failing which might be expected of a writer of songs who has been depending upon words to give fresh interest to his music. There is also evidence in certain unpianistic passages that he was not entirely at home with the piano idiom, for the reason that he was not a very good pianist himself. The story is told that when he once tried to play his own "Wanderer" Fantasia he gave up in disgust with the remark, "Let the devil play this!"

So much for the defects. The pianist who takes them freely for granted and searches instead for virtues is likely to have his eyes opened. There are at least half a dozen of the sonatas which are eminently worth while. It goes without saying that they are full of splendid melody. Schubert simply could not write other than melodiously. Harmonically they are even more interesting. Taking advantage of the freedom offered by the instrument, the composer flooded them with ingenious and kaleidoscopic key colouring. Moreover, some of these pieces have a breadth of dimension and an underlying dramatic force which indicate that Schubert as he grew to manhood had begun to understand the aims of Beethoven. They speak in the grand manner. Certain of them stand out above the rest—those in A minor (Opus 42) and D major (Opus 53), which date from 1825; the brilliant G major (Opus 78) written the next year, and misnamed "Fantasy" by an obtuse publisher; and the three "Large Sonatas" in C minor, A major, and B flat major, written in 1828, the year of the composer's death. To these must be added the spacious "Wanderer" Fantasia, so named because the opening theme of its slow movement derives from the famous song.

There is a revealing fact to be pointed out here. The sonatas which are poorer in quality than those mentioned above are all products of the composer's earlier years. They are hardly more than boyhood attempts. The better ones, for all their blemishes, clearly demonstrate that, although Schubert had not

completely mastered the big forms or the art of development which leads to them, he was definitely on the way to such mastery. There lay the supreme tragedy of his tragic life. He was denied, not the innate talent necessary for the achievement, but the time in which to accomplish and to prove it.

## X

After his first spell of serious illness Schubert was never again a well man. He was subject to recurring periods of sickness and to acute melancholia. The change in his mental outlook is indicated by evidence of dissipation and the adoption of the easy ways of his tavern friends. He drank to excess. For those lapses his reputation has paid dearly. To this day he has to be defended against the notion that he was a "pot-house genius", whose life was shortened and whose art was blemished by misconduct.

One of the happiest periods of his whole life was a trip with Vogl into Upper Austria in 1825. On this occasion Vogl sang for the first time Schubert's newly created songs from Scott's *Lady of the Lake*, including the "Ave Maria". The two men were royally entertained by musical friends; they went on to Linz, to Salzburg, and to Gastein. There the composer wrote his tremendous "Die Allmacht" ["The Almighty"], another song of epic grandeur and solemnity; and there too he may have composed the mysterious "Gastein" Symphony. This work (if he ever really wrote it) is lost; but like Kidd's treasure it still plagues and fascinates the believers in its existence.

In March 1827, Beethoven died, and Schubert bore a torch at his funeral. His melancholy at that event has been noted. A few weeks before he had begun work on another cycle of songs based on poems by Wilhelm Müller, and called "Der Winterreise" ["The Winter Journey"]. Müller too may have had premonitions of death; before the year was out he was dead at the age of thirty-three. The cycle of the "Winterreise" is Schubert's sovereign achievement in the art of song. Certain of his other songs may singly surpass the finest in this cycle, but as a group those of the "Winterreise" are peerless.

Much mournful music has fallen from the pens of composers to whom the business of living was a searing experience. The "Winterreise" songs belong in the forefront of those expressions of the shaken and sorrowing mind. Schubert himself knew that his pieces would be disquietingly strange to his contemporaries. He said to a group of his friends to whom he first sang them, and who sat gloomy and puzzled at the end, "I like them all more than any of the other songs, and the day will come when you will like them too." He knew that this cycle was the hardest task he had ever set himself in song—a twenty-four-part dissertation, of enormous variety and range, upon a single theme of human woe.

The story of "The Winter Journey" is a very different one from that of the Mill cycle. Again it is a lover whose progress is followed, but this time the man's mind is unhinged by the unfaithfulness of his loved one. He plunges out into the bitter cold of a winter night, wandering aimlessly, hoping to find respite; but every aspect of the pale December landscape, every sound that he hears, pulls his mind back like a weighted wheel to his inward agony. A weather-vane reminds him of his sweetheart's affections, which veer with every gust of the wind; he searches for her footsteps in the snow; he recalls the words of love he carved on the bark of an old linden tree. The eerie will-o'-the-wisp leads him on until he finds shelter in a charcoal-burner's hut. There he dreams

of past happiness until the crowing cocks waken him to his cold bed in the freezing winter dawn, and to further wandering and suffering.

Through twenty-four separate songs the lugubrious tale is unfolded. A lesser composer could hardly have avoided a killing monotony inherent in Müller's verses. But Schubert had such a reservoir of creative ideas to draw upon that he could illustrate every facet of thought in the poems with a new and unexpected treatment. There is hardly a weak song in the entire cycle, although a few have stood out above the rest in popularity. Most famous is "The Linden Tree", which is Schubert with all his tenderness, his unblemished sentiment, his simplicity that defies imitation. There is little doubt, however, that the masterpiece of the cycle is the last—"Der Leiermann" ["The Organ Grinder"]. It is a matter of wonderment, fascination, and mystery. "Given a thousand guesses," wrote Richard Capell, "no one could have said that the last song would be at all like this." At the end of a village street the madman meets an old beggar. Ragged and barefoot, he stands on the icy ground, grinding away on a wheezing organ. His cup is empty; "no one listens to him, no one looks or cares. Snarling dogs pursue him, still a smile he wears." At last the madman has met his destiny. "Old man, shall I go with you?" he cries. "Will you set my songs to music?"

"Der Leiermann" is one of the sparest songs ever written. A single empty fifth in the bass drones like a barrel-organ through the entire piece; above it the whining, jangling little tune of the hurdy-gurdy repeats itself again and again, alternating with the voice. Only three score of bars, with the barest handful of notes to each bar—and yet the song crowns the "Winterreise" cycle with a perfection that baffles and haunts the listener.

## XI

The year 1828 was Schubert's last and, like the closing year of Mozart's life it was crowded with creative activity. It was his "great year" in every sense, when his prodigious outflow of work was governed by an assured mastery in every form that he touched. He wrote his great Mass in E flat, three of his best piano sonatas, the String Quintet in C major which is one of the most resplendent works in the whole range of chamber music, a group of songs which include some of the profoundest of all his vocal works, and finally the C major Symphony which now stands shoulder to shoulder with the "Eroica", the Fifth, and the Seventh Symphonies of Beethoven. In the face of these achievements there can be little left of the notion that Schubert was incapable of the workmanship required of the builder in the higher forms.

The C major Symphony was composed in the month of March 1828, but Schubert did not live long enough to hear it performed. When it was first tried out in Vienna the orchestra gave it up because it seemed too involved and difficult. The first performance did not occur until 1839, when Mendelssohn performed it at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. After that occasion a young composer named Robert Schumann wrote, "I say quite frankly that he who is not acquainted with this symphony knows but little of Schubert. . . . Herein is revealed the finest technical skill, life in every fibre of the music, the finest gradations of colouring and care for the minutest detail; the whole structure is shrouded in the cloak of romanticism which has now become familiar to us in Schubert's compositions. It has, too, the same heavenly length as, say, a four-volume



novel by Jean Paul. . . . No symphony has made such a strong impression on us since the days of Beethoven."

When Schumann spoke of "heavenly length" he used a phrase which was often to be quoted in later years with ironic intent. The C major Symphony is in truth a gigantic structure—four long movements which run to forty-five minutes in performance. There were few who, like Schumann, could encompass its tremendous arc without repeated hearings. In 1842 a Paris orchestra refused to go on with it after rehearsing the first movement. Mendelssohn tried it out with the London Philharmonic in 1844 but had to abandon it. There was a famous scene. When the English players came to the wild triplet figures in the last movement they burst out laughing and had to stop. Even as recently as the late 'nineties Felix Weingartner had to defend the work against excisions. Today the C major Symphony has taken its place in the gallery of the world's treasures, beside the best of Beethoven and Bach, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, and Leonardo da Vinci.

If Beethoven's Seventh Symphony may be called an apotheosis of the dance, this C major of Schubert is in an equal sense an apotheosis of song. Schubert had learned how to take the small materials of his songs—the lovely melodies, the prismatic harmonies, the vital rhythms—and expand them into the macrocosmic world of the symphony. Moreover, the composer's power to evoke compelling emotion, so often displayed in his songs, is here given the scope and opportunity worthy of its strength. The symphony is alive with dramatic tension; it abounds with Beethovenian energy. But there is a notable difference to be found here from the style and feeling of the archsymphonist. The dramas suggested by Beethoven's symphonies are Faustlike soul struggles, the continual engaging of the forces of evil and darkness, with the ultimate resolution of doubt into triumph. The C major Symphony is a vast drama of light: there is no evil, no darkness. Even the slow movement avoids the deep shadows that Beethoven might have employed.

Schubert worked harder on this symphony than on any other work. The original manuscript is full of corrections in the composer's own hand, proof that he had realized the value of Beethoven's meticulous workmanship. The last movement is the greatest single movement that he ever wrote. Lawrence Gilman found the only words to describe this amazing creation. They were Francis Thompson's, in praise of *Prometheus Unbound*: "Poetry is spilt like wine, music runs to drunken waste. The choruses sweep down the wind, tirelessly, flight after flight, till the breathless soul almost cries for respite from the unrolling splendours."

One technical feature of this movement is a dramatic device so simple and yet worked out with such effect that Beethoven himself would have envied it. This is the use of a motive built upon a single note repeated four times. Soon after the opening of the movement these four notes appear, breathed softly in the horns, so guilelessly as to seem little more than a rhythmic pulse. As the movement unfolds they begin to take form and importance; their irresistible throbbing begins to dominate all else, making itself felt even when the notes themselves are not the dominating melody. At the stunning and climactic end they reach at last their victory over the entire emotional scheme of the work—as four tremendous Cs, stamped out in unison, fortissimo, like the master cadence of some universal revelry.

## XII

Late in the summer of 1828 Schubert became so ill and so despondent that his brother Ferdinand took him to his house in the suburbs of Vienna. There the composer lived quietly for a time, unsuspecting that the hour had grown late. On the last day of October he suddenly rose from his table at an inn and exclaimed that he could not eat, that his food tasted like poison. He did not realize that the poison in his veins was typhus. In spite of terrible fatigue he tried to go on with his life. Because certain persons had criticized him for deficiencies in his early training, he made arrangements to take lessons in counterpoint. He had seen scores of Handel's oratorios and had realized that there lay grist for the mill of any composer. It was a wish, like all too many of Schubert's, which was never to be fulfilled.

On the twelfth of November he wrote a letter (it was his last) to Schober, saying, "I am ill. I have had nothing to eat or drink for eleven days now, and can only wander feebly and uncertainly between armchair and bed. . . . Please be so good as to come to my aid in this desperate condition with something to read. I have read Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans*, *The Spy*, *The Pilot*, and *The Pioneers*. If by any chance you have anything else of his, I beg you to leave it for me at the coffee-house. . . ."

After that he never left his bed; though he talked at length of plans for another opera, and he sat up to make corrections in the proofs of his "Winterreise" songs. Immersed in those pages of gloom and frustration, he performed his last earthly task. He became delirious, crying out to his brother, "Do not leave me in this corner under the earth." Ferdinand tried to explain that he was in his own bed, in his own house, but the dying man insisted, "No. That cannot be true. Beethoven is not here."

The end came on November 19, 1828. He was thirty-one years old. One final wish at least was carried out, for they buried him at Währing, a few feet from the grave of Beethoven.

The official who made an inventory of the composer's effects recorded a list of his clothes and the bedding—the remnants of a personal life which had never known the meaning of abundance or of comfort. Noted too was a quantity of "old music"—in reality some 500 of the composer's manuscripts. These heaps of pearl were valued at the equivalent of about eight shillings. At first the dust of neglect lay over them and many other of Schubert's scores, the same dust that had choked and smothered the composer himself throughout his life. Years went by before much of it saw light. The famous discovery by George Grove and Arthur Sullivan of the lost music of "Rosamunde" was made as late as 1867.

One group of works at least did not share that fate of prolonged silence. This was the collection of fourteen songs which a publisher brought out some six months after Schubert's death, under the title "Schwanengesang" ["Swan Song"]. These pieces had been written in August 1828 and were the composer's last. Included are songs of undying fame and unexampled greatness. One is the lovely "Serenade", its exquisite texture still whole, in spite of years of hard treatment that would have worn a poorer fabric to shreds. There is also the wildly despairing "Aufenthalt" ["My Abode"], and the last of Schubert's many brook songs, "Liebesbotschaft" ["Love's Message"]. Six of the group are settings of verses by Heinrich Heine. These include "Der Atlas", an

expression of tragic power and great depth of feeling; "Die Stadt" ["The Town"], and "Am Meer" ["By the Sea"], songs whose subtlety and originality hint strongly of an impressionism that was yet three quarters of a century in the future; and finally "Der Doppelgänger" ["The Double"]. In these Heine songs burned the coals of prophecy. Without them the progress of the German *Lied* during the nineteenth century would have been utterly different.

The urge is strong to pronounce "Der Doppelgänger" Schubert's greatest song. The poet stands in the dead of night in a lonely street. "In that house my loved one once dwelt. She is gone; the place is deserted. But there stands a man, staring at the empty house, wringing his hands in despair. I shudder; the moon comes out and I see his face. It is myself! Thou ghastly fellow, thou shadow of my own grief, why do you enact my sorrows of many a night so long ago?"

This is one of those songs, like "Der Leiermann" and "Der Tod und das Mädchen", in which the composer seized upon an idea which would have left any other musician of his time helpless, and proceeded to give it a setting that is a marvel of aptness and economy. The accompaniment is especially stark. It revolves around four chords that strongly suggest the *Dies Irae*. Above their tolling the voice describes the weird scene in recitative-like phrases. The emotional scheme is a curve that rises from a whisper to a climax of great intensity and falls again to nothing. Schubert, the master of harmonic progression, broke all bounds here. The modernity of his chords is astonishing, and like the clash of iron. It would require no wrench of the imagination to place this song fifty years into the future and straight into the hands of Mussorgsky. Both the harmonic colouring and the psychological implications of the song are startlingly Russian.

Thus the man who was "very nearly the greatest of all composers" ended his career—with his eyes upon a horizon far beyond the range of any of his fellows.

## A NOTE ON

Berlioz

1803-69



NO AGE OR PLACE EVER PRODUCED A DENSER CONCENTRATION OF INDIVIDUALISTS, each intent upon the free exfoliation of his own ego, than Paris during the years 1830-40—the bright morning of the romantic era. The city swarmed with wild men of genius, with exotic personalities as brilliantly coloured as so many tropical birds. Romanticism had come of age and 1830 formally celebrated its adulthood. In that year the stupid Bourbonism of Charles X met its end in revolution; in another quarter the riots over the production of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* signalled the victory of the new romantic drama over a dogmatic classicism. In that year Berlioz, "mad Hector of the flaming locks", composed the "Fantastic" Symphony, a musical landmark which was also a testimonial to his unrequited (and later all too completely requited) passion for an Irish actress. Hugo was beginning his long career as dramatist, novelist, and poet; Balzac was toiling away his anchorite existence in an attic, already started on the stupendous task of the *Comédie Humaine*, which was to burn his body out at the age of fifty but leave him the master of all French novelists. Gautier was there, brilliant stylist and passionate romantic; Dumas, the French Scheherazade; Sainte-Beuve, the greatest critical mind of the nineteenth century; George Sand, the woman who dressed like a man, smoked cigars, and performed man's work of writing novels; the German, Heinrich Heine, a poet "who dipped his pen in honey and gall, who sneered and wept in the same couplet", and Mérimée, Stendhal, Lamartine, Musset, and Chateaubriand. Delacroix was there, a man of bold imagination, intellect, and courage, whose work became a lasting ornament to French painting; and Delaroche, Vernet, Corot, Ingres, Ary Scheffer, Rousseau. The roll call of musicians was no less impressive. Besides Berlioz and Chopin there was Liszt, then in the zenith of his flaming youth ("the wild, lightning-flashing, volcanic, heaven-storming Liszt", Heine called him), conquering the piano and women with the same Jovian ease; Rossini, the laziest of geniuses, who stopped work when he was thirty-seven at the height of his career and lived to be seventy-six; Meyerbeer, the man who made opera "grand", i.e. added the elements of spectacle, pageantry and bombast to the fundamentals of music and drama; Thalberg and Kalkbrenner, the rivals of Liszt as piano-taming virtuosi; Auber, Hérold, and a score of other men, once lions but now mere small type in music's footnotes.

The time was one of excess and extravagance. Individualism had boiled over until it dripped down into the fantastic, the exotic, and the downright foolish. To be an apostle of romanticism it seems that one had first to be odd. A strain of morbidity also ran through the minds of half of these romantics. They were filled with obsessions, illnesses of the flesh and of the spirit—and they gloried in them. Dumas wrote that “it was the fashion to suffer from the lungs; everyone was consumptive, poets especially; it was good form to spit blood after every emotion in any way sensational, and to die before reaching thirty”. It was also the fashion to weep, faint, or otherwise carry on during theatrical performances. When Lesueur, an operatic composer and Berlioz’s teacher, first heard Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony he was left so emotionally disorganized that when he started to put on his hat he could not find his head. When Alfred de Musset listened to lines by Racine he would take his head in his hands and blanch with emotion. This same young poet admitted that, after his affair with George Sand had ended with her in the arms of the Italian Dr. Pagello, he spent four months shut up in his room in incessant tears.

It was the day of the grand passion and the *idée fixe*. Men’s minds seemed to be conditioned less according to rational patterns than in imitation of some literary figure—the more morbid the better. If one did not fancy oneself a Werther with suicidal melancholia, one might be a Faust in the throes of a soul struggle, or a Manfred hiding in his bosom some nameless sin of sins. Lord Byron himself had been one of the most popular literary figures in Europe; he had personified Werther, Don Juan, and Manfred all rolled into one; he was poet, adventurer, cynical sensualist, and possibly murderer. His very death was a piece of romantic idealism—an Englishman dying for the cause of Greek freedom.

If anyone could be said to personify that age—to typify (paradoxically) an era which was all untyped individualists—that man was surely Hector Berlioz. The greatest of French romantic composers, and one of the most original musicians who ever lived, was also a character who could serve as a model for some of the choicest aberrations of abnormal psychology. His life was a long train of misfortunes of every sort, caused by his work, the world, and women—and at least half of them were purely imaginary. Had he lived a hundred years later he would have spent hours pouring his troubles into the ears of psychiatrists. Being denied that luxury, he wrote them instead in his celebrated *Memoirs*. That fascinating, overheated collection of fact and fancy is far from the most accurate book ever written by a great musician, but it is surely a masterpiece of revelation, both of the author and his age. Berlioz never hid the truth about himself; on the contrary, he told all—and with a passionate and disarming abandon.

His life was a careening toboggan-ride up and down the heights, from bliss to despair. Born in Côte Saint-André, near Grenoble, in 1803, he was the son of a provincial doctor who sent him to Paris when he was eighteen years old to study medicine, in spite of his desire to compose music. The sights of the dissecting-room filled him with horror, at the same time that his first experiences in the opera-house raised his musical ambitions to fever heat. He gave up medicine but remained in Paris and became a composer. He almost starved to death during his early years of study, but when he was twenty-six he wrote the “Fantastic” Symphony, one of the most daringly original works in music.

The genesis of this piece was a theatrical performance in Paris at which Berlioz saw Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* for the first time, and an Irish actress, Henrietta

Smithson, who was a sensation as Ophelia. It was love at the very first glance. The composer wrote in his *Memoirs*: "I became possessed by an intense, overpowering sense of sadness, that in my then sickly, nervous state produced a mental condition adequately to describe which would take a great physiologist. I could not sleep, I could not work, and I spent my time wandering aimlessly about Paris and its environs. During that long period of suffering I can only recall four occasions on which I slept. . . ." As a means of getting the attention of the actress and impressing her, he wrote his symphony and got it performed in Paris. After some years of desperately unhappy amorous adventure he married Miss Smithson, and the marriage was a failure more excruciating than the courtship. Berlioz loved at least five different women in his lifetime, all with consuming ardour, but in true romantic fashion he lost all of them. After divorcing the actress he married another lady who made him miserable when she tried to sing his songs. When he was an old man he decided that he had in reality loved but one of them—the first love of his adolescence. He sought her out finally, an old white-haired lady of sixty-seven with four grown sons, who remained only bewildered when he insisted that he had loved her for almost fifty years, even though in that time he had seen her but once.

Berlioz's music brought him even less happiness than his love affairs, because he was a prophet without honour in his own country. His originality and his genius were misunderstood in France and he was generally regarded as a wild man. Certainly he did little to allay the fears of the conservatives, for he was an eccentric, terrifically earnest man, passionately sure of himself and his destiny, an exhibitionist who became at last, through frustration and disappointment, embittered, disillusioned, and cynical.

There is a strong temptation to dwell upon the life and personality of this composer (it would be an impossibility for anyone to write a dull biography of him), but it is nevertheless his music that remains the more fascinating part of him. The "Fantastic" Symphony is a piece of musical pioneering of the first order—like a sudden tearing aside of a curtain to reveal in an instant the whole scene of musical romanticism as it was to develop during the next half century. It is the first "programme symphony" (anticipated, it is true, by Beethoven's "Pastoral"), the first modern symphony with a fully developed literary plot. Brilliant, flamboyant, saturated with Byronic passions and ornamented with Poe-like grotesquerie, the "Fantastic" Symphony broke away completely and for the first time from the austerities of German classicism.

Its programme was published by the composer as follows, in a preface to the score: "A young musician of morbid sensibility and ardent imagination poisons himself with opium in a fit of amorous despair. The narcotic dose, too weak to result in death, plunges him into a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest visions, during which his sensations, sentiments, and recollections are translated in his sick brain into musical thoughts and images. The beloved woman herself has become for him a melody, a recurring theme (*idée fixe*) which he finds and hears everywhere." The five movements of the symphony are also plotted in detail. I. Dreams and Passions: in which he recalls the melancholy yearnings and joys he experienced before seeing his beloved, the "volcanic love" with which she inspired him, and his moments of "delirious anguish". II. A Ball: at which he sees his beloved in the midst of a brilliant fête. III. Scene in the Fields: two shepherds piping; he is tranquil until *she* appears and he has a horrible presentiment that she may prove false. Thunder sounds in the distance, then silence. IV. March to the Scaffold: he dreams that he has killed

his beloved, is condemned, and led to the execution block. At the end the *idée fixe* reappears for an instant, interrupted by the stroke of the axe. V. Dream of a Witches' Sabbath: he is in the midst of a frightful company of ghosts, magicians, and monsters who have come for his obsequies. Even her theme is made grotesque as she takes part in the diabolic orgy. The witches dance to a parody of the *Dies Irae*.

The young man of twenty-six who dreamed this morbid and fantastic dream did not create an unflawed masterpiece. The work is uneven—at times tragically so—but it teems with ideas. A new imagination, powerful and original, is at work and the sparks fly in all directions. Moreover, the piece was only the first of a long series of efforts that contained more of revolution and image-breaking. The "Harold in Italy" Symphony (1834) was another symphonic adventure, based on Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. The entire work is built round an elaborate part for solo viola (supposedly the voice of Childe Harold), making it a kind of romantic concerto. The "dramatic symphony"—"Romeo and Juliet" (1839)—is an even more elaborate exposition of a literary work, a seven-part structure for chorus, orchestra, and soloists, describing various scenes from the play. "The Damnation of Faust" (1846) is a hybrid, half opera and half oratorio, based on a free interpretation of Goethe's drama. Meanwhile, in 1837, Berlioz had composed his Requiem, a work notorious in the history of music for its employment of the most gigantic of all orchestral forces. The score calls for a string section of more than one hundred players, twelve horns, four cornets, twelve trumpets, sixteen trombones, six ophicleides, and sixteen kettledrums—besides a host of woodwinds and percussion, and a chorus of more than 200 voices. This, moreover, was only a fraction of the army of performers which the composer had originally planned for the work.

Heinrich Heine, who knew the composer in Paris, said of him: "He is an immense nightingale, a lark as great as an eagle. . . . The music causes me to dream of fabulous empires filled with fabulous sins." The empires of Hector Berlioz remain so many fantastic pieces of architecture reared against the sky of romantic music; and they remain, too, after 100 years, a centre of controversy. No music over so long a period has been more berated, belittled, defended. In all the criticism of Berlioz's work one word appears like a recurring theme—uneven. For all the boldness and vehemence of his style he could not escape inequality of inspiration. It was not that he ever descended into the meretricious or the cheap; his bombast or his dullness results not from a failure of his taste but from an unaccountable thinning of his ideas. He did not seem to know whether an idea was good or empty.

As a result it is the big works of Berlioz, those which represented his greatest ambitions and his most daring leaps into the future, which suffer most. The best of them are all repositories of music which is splendidly vital and enduring, but not one is a complete and rounded masterpiece. Individual movements, shorter pieces, fragments from some larger whole—these are often superb; for example, the "Roman Carnival" Overture, in which melodic verve and orchestral colour are fused into a scintillating whole that never for an instant falters; or the famous short pieces from "The Damnation of Faust", or the "Queen Mab" Scherzo from "Romeo and Juliet", or certain sections of the "Fantastic" Symphony. In the course of the long, sustained efforts, however, Berlioz's strength fails him and his breath gives out. Often his weakness is melodic. He lacked a large fund of interesting thematic ideas. His melodic invention,

moreover, was sometimes inadequate to the boldness of his other schemes. At times when he was writing dramatically, harmonically, and orchestrally in the future, he was still melodically in the past. Berlioz had his idiosyncrasies, too, which often mar his work : one the habit of building towards stunning climaxes which disappear suddenly into thin air ; another of putting puny musical ideas in structural frames too big for their importance.

Thus the music of Berlioz is often that of the revolutionist who has not quite the strength to make his ideas stick. Other men copied them, improved them, and made them completely successful. Part of Berlioz's weakness came undoubtedly from his own character. He lacked the balance-wheel of self-criticism, a governor on his cyclonic temperament. There is also something of the amateur about him ; he is brilliant but erratic.

Berlioz's contributions to music, despite his faults, were of high importance. One of the foremost was his work in establishing the new spirit of romanticism in music. It is true that he was practically ignored during his lifetime in his own country, but in Germany and later in Russia his influence was enormous. He helped set the new style which broke away from eighteenth-century classic abstractions into vividly coloured pictures and stories in music. He injected a stronger emotional force into this art, and a new element of strangeness and fantasy.

Technically his contributions were even more potent, especially in that field in which his pre-eminence has never been denied—orchestration. Berlioz was the first composer with a modern conception of instrumentation as a means of virtuosity for its own sake. He experimented with the various instruments, singly and in combination, in order to draw from them colours and timbres which his predecessors had never suspected. He added new instruments, including the harp and English horn. From all of them he made new demands of virtuosity and tonal range. It is significant that Berlioz never learned to play the piano. The orchestra was his personal instrument, and he thought directly in terms of it. His *Treatise on Instrumentation*, published in 1844, is the classic work on the subject. All great orchestrators who came after him—Liszt, Wagner, Rimsky-Korsakov, Strauss, Stravinsky, Ravel, and a host of others—owe him a debt.



# Chopin

1810-49



IT WAS IN MID-SEPTEMBER 1831 THAT FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN ARRIVED FOR THE FIRST time in Paris. He was twenty-one years old—a thin, sickly young Pole with a pale face, a long nose that curved like a scimitar, and large, pouting sensuous lips. He was a sad young man; for he was bewildered, alone, and without money in a strange city which knew nothing of his talents as pianist and composer. His loneliness was aggravated by homesickness of the most poignant sort. Only a few weeks before a calamity had befallen his native land. The Russians had captured Warsaw. The thought of that devastation, and the possible fate of his family and friends, had left his mind in torment. He looked upon the gaudy French metropolis with mingled emotions. He wrote:

“There is the utmost luxury, the utmost swinishness, the utmost virtue, the utmost ostentation; at every step advertisements of venereal disease; shouting, racket, bustle, and more mud than it is possible to imagine; one can perish in this paradise, and it is convenient, from this point of view, that nobody asks how anybody lives. You can walk in the streets dressed in rags, and frequent tiptop society; one day you can eat the most hearty dinner for thirty-two sous in a restaurant with mirrors, gilding, and gas lighting, and the next you can lunch where they will give enough for a dickeybird to eat, and charge three times as much. . . .” He noted the hordes of “shabby individuals with wild physiognomies”, but also the “host of interesting people here, belonging to the various professions”.

Chopin did not know it then, but he had found his spiritual home. Paris was to be his headquarters for the remainder of his life. His work there was to make him one of the most influential creative musicians of the century, the supreme composer for the piano, and one of the greatest Poles of modern times.

Chopin became music's outstanding specialist. His range was not panoramic but confined; his frail body and essentially limited mental scope reduced his interests to a narrow field. That field was a single instrument—the piano—but he understood it so profoundly that in a comparatively few years of work he almost exhausted the things that a composer could do with it. Chopin was one of the most original of musicians. He was also a stylist, the first modern stylist in music. If his sphere was small, it was also full of refinements; and his influence extended far afield into musical quarters where he himself did not dare venture.

He was born in a village near Warsaw, on February 22, 1810. His mother

was Polish but his father was a Frenchman, who taught the French language for a living and held a professorship in several important Polish schools. Frédéric's unusual musical talent was discovered when he was six years old, and thereafter his family gave him the advantage of the best teaching available in Warsaw. He was so precocious at composition that many thought he would outstrip Mozart, but he was also such a remarkable pianist that it was not certain which way his future lay. When he was nineteen he heard Hummel, a noted pianist of the day, and Paganini, who set the violin afire with virtuosity. That decided him on being a pianist. Before he came to Paris he had given concerts with mild success in Warsaw, Vienna, Prague, Teplitz, and Dresden.

It is a tribute to Chopin's sanity and his sincerity as an artist that in an age of poseurs, and in the Paris that was a hive of mountebanks, he never succumbed to a pose. Nevertheless, he too was an odd man. For one thing there was ingrained in his soul a deep strain of melancholy. His whole life after childhood was coloured by it; his music, of course, was drenched and tear-stained by it. Part of his mental suffering was the result of a sensitive mind being placed in a sickly body. The last half of his life was a struggle against tuberculosis. Another cause of his moodiness was his pathological attachment to his native Poland, the country he had to leave as a young man never to return, and which he saw mangled under the wheels of war.

Psychologically there was something within him that was badly warped. He never married, but all through his life he suffered from the frustrations of love. There exist passionate love letters which he wrote as a boy of eighteen to another young man. The evidence of homosexual tendencies is unmistakable. Later he fell in love with a young girl singing student at the Warsaw Conservatorium, Constantia Gladkowska. He was so shy that he scarcely dared to meet her, much less tell her of his love. Constantia became the means of turning him into a morose and brooding man, lonely of mind and disconsolate of spirit. There is no doubt that he dramatized and half consciously enjoyed his frustration.

When he was twenty-four he fell in love with Marie Wodzinska, the nineteen-year-old daughter of a Polish count. She was a flighty, coquettish girl who led him on; but her family objected to her romance with a musician, and a sickly one at that. A few years later their engagement petered out. After Chopin's death all the letters of Marie and her family and a faded rose she had given him were found carefully wrapped in an envelope marked, "My sorrow."

These affections, however, were merely a prelude to the great love of his life, which began in Paris in 1838, when he was twenty-eight. This was his affair with George Sand. It lasted for eight years. Its final rupture brought first his creative career and then his life to an end.

## II

Chopin's talent as a pianist was one of the most remarkable and one of the rarest in the history of the instrument. He was a brilliant technician, but he suppressed that side of his art for the exquisite and the subtle. Lacking the physical strength of Liszt, who could (and often did) smash the insides of a piano at a blow, he developed instead a marvellous fluency and a control of tonal colour that was unique. Some critics complained of his extreme pianissimos which hardly rose above a whisper, and the intense refinements of his style; but most listeners were impressed. They had never heard tones of such singing quality or such ethereal delicacy drawn from the instrument.

The young man's first few months in Paris were hard and grim. He gave a few concerts which were financial failures. But at least they gained him the admiration of certain influential musicians—especially Mendelssohn and Liszt—who introduced him to important musical and social circles. Chopin soon realized that the concert platform was not for him. It was not alone that his playing was too intimate for large rooms. "The crowd intimidates me," he later wrote to Liszt; "its breath suffocates me; I feel paralysed by its strange look, and the sea of unknown faces makes me dumb." He gave up the idea of making money as a virtuoso, and for a time he even thought despondently of going to America. Then suddenly his prospects changed. His reputation as a pianist began to bring in pupils—the well-paying kind from the Parisian aristocracy. Soon, with an income assured, he began to live exactly as he pleased.

Chopin was the sybarite of composers. He loved luxurious surroundings, elegant clothes, aristocratic people. When he chose an apartment it had to be in the best neighbourhood, away from bad smells, smoke, or the sound of blacksmiths. He spent money lavishly on his furnishings, selecting everything with the care of an interior decorator. He loved flowers, and it gave him a sense of exquisite pleasure to have his rooms pervaded by the odour of violets. Beside his bed there had to be volumes of poetry. The small and beautifully ordered existence which he carved out around himself suited him ideally. He wanted no intruders; only a few favourite pupils and his chosen friends, most of them socially prominent Poles. Each day he taught for a few hours, in a precise, efficient way. He liked teaching. Clothes were both a delight and a problem. He wore velvet waistcoats (generally black), patent-leather shoes, white or yellow gloves; but the rest of his costume was sombre. His standard was that difficult one for which members of the Conservative Club everywhere strive—an unmistakable elegance which contrives to avoid the slightest hint of loudness. He got himself a carriage so that he could go about the mud of Paris in a manner befitting a gentleman. The orbit of his movements was narrow—the opera (which he adored), a few concerts, the houses of wealth and society to which his playing gave him entree. In these last places he was happy and at home—and for two reasons. First, he was a snob, as one might surmise from the long list of princesses, countesses, and baronesses to whom he dedicated his works. Second, he could not bear coarseness or vulgarity in people any more than he could in clothes, and in the polite society of aristocratic ladies his sensibilities were less likely to be assaulted. He was decidedly a prude. Once he almost broke up his friendship with Liszt when he discovered that in his absence the pianist had used his rooms for an assignation. Mme. Sand wrote that Chopin "never contemplated without dread the idea of leaving Paris, his physician, his acquaintances, his room even, and his piano. He was a slave to habit, and every change, however small it might be, was a terrible event in his life." He had constructed a charming hot-house existence, ideally suited to his proud, sensitive nature, and he proposed to enjoy it to the full. Fortunately, it was an existence which also suited his creative needs. It permitted him to devote the best of what little energy he had to composition.

### III

A mere listing of Chopin's works is curiously revealing. In the first place it is a meagre output: a dozen thin volumes will house his entire life's work.

Coming after such producers as Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, who turned their works out in bales, Chopin seems almost like a loafer. Rather he was a perfectionist. He never set a note down carelessly, and he never tired of polishing and changing. As he worked over his manuscripts he tortured himself with doubts about the minutest details, unable to make up his mind.

His output was otherwise restricted. The great composers who came before him were generally producers in a wide variety of forms—symphonies, operas, church music, chamber works, and pieces for various solo instruments. Only the piano interested Chopin. The rest he almost totally ignored. There is no such thing as a Chopin symphony, string quartet, opera, or Mass. There are only a few chamber pieces, early works mostly; and even they centre around the piano.

Even in his special field of the piano he composed with a disdain of conventions. Up to his time most serious piano music consisted of sonatas and concertos. These were the large classic forms in which a composer was expected to express his ideas for the instrument. Chopin wrote only three sonatas and two concertos. The bulk of his piano works came under headings which were new and strange in his time for a composer of serious purposes. These are the titles which he chiefly used: Mazurkas, Polonaises, Waltzes, Rondós, Impromptus, Etudes, Nocturnes, Scherzos, Preludes, Fantaisies, and Ballades. All of these, except the Ballade, which he invented, were established musical forms when Chopin took them over. But in every case the basic idea was subjected, under his hand, to "a sea change into something rich and strange".

There was another reason for Chopin's preoccupation with these unconventional forms, beyond the desire for individuality. He found out early in his career that he could not write successfully in the old matrices of the sonata and the concerto. His first piano sonata, written when he was eighteen, is a premature birth—dead before it ever breathed. The two piano concertos, both written before he was twenty, are much better; but they are played today only because of their fine piano parts. The orchestral material is amateurish and weak. Chopin could not get his ideas working on a grand scale. Fortunately, he soon gave up trying and devoted himself to the thing he could do best—the exploitation of small instrumental forms. In this field his accomplishment was surpassed by only one other composer—the omnipotent one in forms both great and small—J. S. Bach.

Chopin was fortunate in discovering something else in his early years as a composer—his own characteristic style. It is one of the most individual of all musical styles, stamped in almost every bar with his trademark, and recognizable instantly as his alone. It might well have taken him years to evolve. Nevertheless, even a piece like the Variations, Opus 2, for piano and orchestra, a product of his eighteenth year, contains in astonishing measure the essentials which were to serve him throughout his career. (This is the piece which called forth from Robert Schumann one of the most famous remarks in music history: "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!") It is often said that of all important composers Chopin seemed to develop the least. Of course he *did* develop. With every work that he turned out, his musical ideas became subtler and more original, his technical devices more brilliant, his handling of material more assured. But it was all within the confines of the general style which he cut out for himself when hardly more than a boy.

Chopin's style had many ramifications, and even certain peculiarities; but none of them was arbitrary. Almost everything that he did stemmed directly

from his intuitive knowledge of the piano and all its possibilities. It was a mastery for which the instrument itself had been waiting for more than a hundred years. The piano is by far the most successful musical instrument ever invented—successful in the sense that it is not only a resplendent producer of musical sound, but an immensely practical one as well. It is Chopin's distinction that he was the first composer who understood what the piano could do.

Everyone knows that the name "piano" derives from the original name, "pianoforte", which meant literally "soft loud", and which indicated a range of dynamics impossible on clavichords and harpsichords. But that was not the only point of the pianoforte's early significance. The inventor, an Italian named Cristofori, had produced something else—a mechanical device which was the real revolutionary nub of his new instrument. For years before him builders of clavichords and harpsichords had been trying to solve the problem of a successful hammer-action for keyboard instruments. In clavichords the strings were struck by small brass wedges; in harpsichords they were plucked by quills. These devices permitted a free vibration of the strings, but in both instruments (in the clavichord especially) the tone produced was weak and thin. Builders knew that a hammer of some kind striking the string would produce a richer, purer tone, but what eluded them was a method of getting the hammer to escape from the string the instant after it struck, thus allowing the string to vibrate freely. The problem seems simplicity itself; nevertheless it remained unsolved until Cristofori worked it out with an ingenious mechanism. His was also a fairly complex mechanism, as anyone may see by looking at its modern counterpart in any piano action today.

Once he had worked out his clever hammer device, Cristofori also strengthened the frame of his instruments so that he could stretch the strings much tighter. This meant that they could withstand heavier hammer blows and thus sustain their tones longer. And there, in essence, was the triumph of the pianoforte: a clear, ringing, sustained tone which got away from the monotonous twang of the plucked tone of the harpsichord; and a range of dynamics which neither the harpsichord nor the clavichord could approach.

Cristofori's invention dated from 1711. Musicians being among the most conservative of all the artistic species, it is not surprising that many years went by before the pianoforte made any impression at all. Bach knew very little about it until as late as 1747, when he played on the pianofortes which a German builder named Silbermann made for Frederick the Great. It was not until Mozart's time that the new instrument began generally to supplant the older ones. Mozart himself preferred the pianoforte, but he had a hard time adapting his technique to it; his compositions are almost entirely in the old harpsichord style. Beethoven was the first important composer who realized that the piano required a new kind of music especially constructed for it. His greater piano sonatas, with their exploitation of the singing tone of the piano, their use of chordal masses and a wide range of dynamics, would have been as insipid on a harpsichord as modern electrical records played on an old acoustical phonograph.

Beethoven went far, but it remained for Chopin to go the final step and to free writing for the piano from the last vestiges of the clavichord-harpsichord style. He also avoided the mistake which Beethoven often fell into—confusing the idiom of the piano with that of the orchestra. Chopin recognized the piano as a contrivance capable of an infinite variety of beautiful sonorities. He did not try merely to adapt those sonorities to suit preconceived musical styles; he also

worked in the opposite direction, creating new technical ideas in music which would exploit the piano tone to the full. The style which he thus developed was so perfectly suited to the instrument, and went so far in sounding out all its possibilities, that for more than fifty years after him no composer made any important advance beyond it. Claude Debussy, early in the present century, was the first to produce important new ideas for the piano which did not stem directly from Chopin.

## IV

Around the turn of the present century, James Huneker, the most civilized of modern American music critics, whose understanding of Chopin's music was as penetrating as his love for it was unaffected, was moved to write an essay called *The Greater Chopin*. "The old Chopin," he said, "is gone for most of us. . . . The E flat Nocturne is drummed by schoolgirls as a study in chord playing for the left hand, and the mazurkas—heaven protect us!—what have not these poor dances, with their sprightly rhythms, now wilted, been subjected to; with what strange oaths have they not been played? . . . Poor Chopin! devoured by those ravening wolves, the concert pianists, tortured by stupid pupils and smeared with the kisses of sentimentalists, well may you cry aloud from the heights of Parnassus, 'Great Jove, deliver me from my music!'"

What Huneker was protesting against, with all the vigour of his articulate and colourful pen, was the last and worst stage of the late nineteenth-century Chopin craze. For a time almost as much Chopin music was played by pianists on recital stages as that of all other composers combined. The all-Chopin programme became a commonplace when no one would have dared to limit a programme to the works of any other single composer. Like the insane run on Tchaikovsky's symphonic music in more recent years, the Chopin craze threatened at last to crush the life out of the defenceless object of its affections.

Fortunately, as Huneker was at pains to point out, there are two Chopins: the inferior one who was almost destroyed in the orgy of overplaying, and the "greater Chopin", as Huneker called him, whom age cannot wither nor custom stale. In his essay Huneker went through the composer's works and made his selections, separating the sheep from the goats. It is the best evaluation of the Pole's music which the present writer knows, and it can be recommended to music lovers with only this reservation: if one is lucky enough not to have heard too much Chopin, one may still find beauty and freshness and melodic charm in many of the lesser pieces which overplaying has ruined for others—yes, even in pieces like that poor tortured "Fantaisie Impromptu" whose insides were ripped out to make "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows". But one would be wise not to linger over them too long. There is too much of loveliness and splendour, of far more enduring satisfaction awaiting in the greater Chopin.

To begin with, there are the Etudes. Now the very word "étude" is synonymous with some of the flattest, dreariest words in the language, i.e. "study", "practice piece", "exercise". It is the last form in the world in which one would expect to find sentiment, poetry, drama, or the play of strong emotions. But that is precisely the use which Chopin made of it. He wrote twenty-seven Etudes, two sets of twelve (published as Opus 10 and Opus 25) and a final set of three. They have been called music's most triumphant wedding of pedagogy and art. It is remarkable that Chopin wrote most of them while still in his teens and early twenties.

Each one is based on some problem of piano technique, but unless a listener is told he would never suspect the core of pure mechanics which lies under the veil of art. He would never imagine, for example, that the melting, heartbreaking song of the E major Etude (Opus 10), or the equally sorrowful lamentations of the C sharp minor (Opus 25) are in reality testing grounds for the pianist's touch—for his ability to sustain a singing tone and a smooth legato style. Or that the eerie, faintly sinister G sharp minor (Opus 25), which races and whistles and sighs like autumn wind in a chimney, is the most famous exercise ever devised to make the pianist play thirds in the right hand at dazzling speed. Or that the titantic C minor (Opus 10), though it may indeed be a "Revolutionary" Etude from the fact that Chopin probably composed it when in torment over the fall of Warsaw to the Russians, is nevertheless a test of dexterity for the pianist's left hand, and a means of teaching him to conserve his strength through many measures of sustained violence.

So cunningly is the mechanical problem disguised that the listener can hear every one of the Etudes and never suspect that the pianist is actually practising arpeggios which stretch beyond an octave, or speedy passage work, or dexterity in thirds and sixths, or strengthening figures for the third, fourth, and fifth fingers of the right hand—he will not suspect it, that is, unless the pianist has the soul of a machine. From the pianist's viewpoint it should be admitted that the Etudes in the aggregate are works of appalling difficulty. Inside of everyone, and apart from the main technical problem, there bristle numerous minor problems and pitfalls—of rhythm, phrasing, accent, pedalling, etc.—thrown in here and there to trip the unwary. Anyone who can play all the Etudes and play them well may qualify as a concert pianist of distinction. They are the backbone of all modern piano technique. But that fact alone is not what keeps them alive. They would be so much sterile Czerny were it not for the rich investiture of poetry with which Chopin clothed them.

The Etudes are the first of Chopin's works which exhibit in full panoply his magnificent use of harmonic colour. It is one of the more diverting contradictions of genius that this man, who was as prim and timid as a girl in his personal life, had the boldness of an Arctic explorer when he set his musical ideas to work. In the field of harmony he was a rule-breaker second only to Wagner. Like Schubert, he had extreme agility in modulation; he could leap from key to key with ease, and he had a highly developed sense of the sheer beauty of key contrasts. But while Schubert's harmony was chiefly diatonic, i.e. based on the natural notes of the scale of a particular key, Chopin began the extensive use of chromatic harmony, which means modulation through the sharps and flats not at all related to the key. In this respect he was the ground-breaker for Wagner, and all the teeming chromaticism which has flooded modern music since *Tristan and Isolde*. Chopin also loved the use of dissonance and even discord, and he threw aside so many of the old theoretical rules of harmonic procedure that the pedants of his time came to the comforting conclusion that his early training must have been deficient.

## V

Chopin had a passion for the dance. At least a quarter of his compositions are based on three dance forms—the polonaise, the mazurka, and the waltz. He worked at them almost continuously throughout his creative career. Even

though only a few of these many pieces reach the high altitudes of the composer's inspiration, they are nevertheless among his most ingratiating works. They represent a side of Chopin which is treasurable because it is unique.

The polonaise was not a folk dance. It originated in the sixteenth century among the Polish nobility. Furthermore, in the words of Franz Liszt, "this dance is one of those rare exceptions designed to show off not the women but the men, to exhibit manly beauty, to set off noble and dignified deportment and martial yet courtly bearing". It is too bad that more concert pianists do not prepare their performances of the Chopin Polonaises by reading the description of this dance and its origins contained in Liszt's book on the life of Chopin. It is a vivid picture of a vanished glory—the once-proud aristocracy of Poland when she was one of the most vigorous states in Europe. It makes plain the fact that the polonaise began not as a dance but as a march, a processional. In the great houses of the Polish nobles the assembled company would pass in review to the strains of stirring music. "A rhythmical, regularly cadenced, undulating step was secured, and the entire form of each dancer swayed with graceful wavings and harmonious poising."

In the Polonaises of Frédéric Chopin these brilliant rhythmical pageants are re-created in tone, and the martial spirit of the country he worshipped rises from the ashes of the past. Some of the Polonaises are sheer exultations in march step—especially the one in A major, and the celebrated "Drum" Polonaise in A flat major. In these pieces Chopin pushed the piano to its limits for sheer volume of sound. The A flat Polonaise requires prodigious endurance. Only the greatest pianists should attempt it; the rest succeed only in giving the piano a thorough pounding, exhausting both themselves and their listeners.

Not all the Polonaises ring with victory. The dark side of Chopin's nature, which appeared in every form that he touched, crops out in such essays as the Polonaise in E flat minor, and the altogether superb one in F sharp minor. Under the gloomy surface of their melodies and their prevailing minor modes smoulder defeat and despair. Deep below is a red-eyed fury, ready to burst forth in savage revolt. Some day, these pieces seem to imply, someone is to pay for the ruination of Poland and her monstrous injustices.

The Chopin Polonaises are the most thoroughly masculine music ever written for the piano. Yet they came from a man who was a physical weakling, with a marked psychological leaning towards the feminine. Many of his reactions were feminine. He could weep and sentimentalize like a woman; he loved the womanly refinements of life. The Polonaises prove beyond doubt the duality of his nature. The body was epicene and the temperament febrile; but somewhere inside of him there was enough masculinity to serve a gladiator.

The Mazurkas are the feminine counterparts of the Polonaises. They are much more modest, intimate, and subtle. The original form was a national Polish dance, and in his translations into piano music Chopin used many native Polish melodies. He wrote more than fifty Mazurkas, but only a few have become popular. In mood they range from the rollicksome and completely carefree to the extremes of melancholia. Most of them are a blend of different moods, the alternations of sadness and gaiety so typical of Slavic natures.

What Chopin did in his Mazurkas was a procedure since copied by many modern composers: that of taking the essential idioms of some simple, often primitive form, and translating them into his own highly refined style. In the Mazurkas he used the authentic Polish melodies and their infectious, unpredictable rhythms; the odd harmonic touches, typical of their folk origin, though



grit to the taste of his Western contemporaries; the capricious changes of mood, and above all the *tempo rubato*. This last means simply that the player disregards a strict metronomelike tempo and hurries or lingers over certain phrases of the music. It was by no means a new thing in Chopin's time, but he used it so freely that he aroused the especial fury of the pedants. All these elements Chopin took from their crude native state and fashioned them into exquisite piano pieces, like a craftsman making sturdy woods into delicate drawing-room furniture.

His contemporaries said that the composer himself played his Mazurkas incomparably. There, it should be remarked, lies the reason for their comparative neglect today. The Mazurkas are the most thoroughly Polish of all Chopin's works, and they require Poles, or at the outside Slavs, to play them. Under the fingers of pianists who have the right temperament they are irresistible. Otherwise they can be as flat as American dance music played by Europeans.

The waltz was a new thing in Chopin's time. At first it was even a matter of scandal. In an age of square dances the sight of two young persons holding each other in close embrace and flying round a ballroom to this giddy new rhythm was enough to make the righteous blush. But the young bloods had their way. Aided and abetted by the fabulous Strauss family, the waltz soon became the craze of Europe, and the old square dances were doomed.

Like the Mazurkas, the Chopin Waltzes are a refinement of the original simple idea. Huneker called them "dances for the soul, not the body"; and Schumann said that the ladies who dance them should at least be countesses. Unfortunately, they are also among the composer's most popular pieces, which means that they have been worn thin by students who use them as finger exercises and virtuosi who toss them off as facile encores. This writer, for one, would relish the now impossible experience of coming upon some of them for the first time—say the Valse brillante in A flat major (Opus 34, No. 1), which is as glittering as a chandelier of glass; or the A flat major (Opus 42) with its clever insinuation of a rhythm in double time over the prevailing three-quarter—an altogether captivating piece.

Even in so vivacious a form as the waltz, Chopin could not repress his inbred pessimism. Several of these pieces are in the minor mode, of which two (the A minor and the C sharp minor) are the best of the entire group. The C sharp minor is great Chopin, a product of his last years. The original shallow framework of the waltz is completely obscured under a mood of dreamy, reflective sadness. At every point it avoids the commonplace.

## VI

It is now practically impossible to write without a certain degree of impatience about the Chopin Nocturnes. No compositions of the Pole have been subjected to a worse mauling, none have been more sentimentalized, none more heavily "smeared with kisses". Partly it is the composer's own fault. Given the basic idea of a dreamy, nostalgic night piece, full of starlight and romantic heartbreak, Chopin naturally let himself go. Even in some of the best of these works he comes close to drowning himself in his own sorrow. A few of the weaker ones are not much more than sugar and tears.

The piano nocturne as a form was invented, oddly enough, by a fat, wine-

drinking Irish composer named John Field, who was born in Dublin in 1782. His originals are almost forgotten today, though they had a considerable vogue in Chopin's time. Field did not care for his Polish rival's essays: "He has a sick-room talent," was his sneering remark. Nevertheless, the Chopin Nocturnes are among the most popular works ever written for the piano. Containing as they do some of the composer's most luscious melodies and his most iridescent harmonic colouration, in addition to their tear-drenched poetry, it is easy to understand their fascination for a sentimental public.

It is also clear that Chopin himself felt the limitations of the nocturne, for as he matured as an artist he tried hard to improve and vary the form itself. Realizing the monotony of his slow-moving melodies, he devised middle sections in a contrasting vein—sometimes even in violent opposition to the prevailing nocturnal mood, as if his brooding had been interrupted by sudden emotional storms. For example, the C sharp minor Nocturne (Opus 27, No. 1), a distinguished work at which no one may sneer, builds up to a climax of massive power. So does the noble C minor (Opus 48, No. 1), probably the finest of all the Nocturnes.

More obviously than any others of his works the Nocturnes point to Chopin's command of his melodic lines. Everyone knows that he was a first-rate inventor of melodies, but not many realize that the instrument for which he wrote them is far from being the ideal melodic medium. The perfect medium for melody is the violin, or rather the string section of an orchestra. No tone in the world approximates its smooth legato. The piano is a percussive instrument. Its striking action of hammer against string, even though a great improvement over the old *claviers*, is still subject to the danger of monotony. Its tone, though pure and lovely, cannot be sustained; it begins slowly to die an instant after hammer and string meet. Chopin understood the piano so profoundly that he was able to turn these weaknesses almost into virtues. Even in his earliest compositions he began experimenting to find ways and means of sustaining the interest in his melodies over long stretches, a feat easy for the violin but difficult for the piano.

At first he used the ornaments which were the common devices of his time—the little turns and trills which the old composers in harpsichord days had to fall back on to keep important notes in their melodies alive. Chopin improved and elaborated on them; and because he was passionately devoted to opera he also borrowed ideas from the florid cadenzas of Italian coloratura singing. He developed a whole new language of ornamentation, until his music was studded with little turns, trills, sudden runs that dart up and down the piano, tiny cadenzas that are like sprays of raindrops. To this day these decorations are the most purely Chopinesque features of his music. But they were far from being mere feminine fripperies—jewelled necklaces to set off a musical gown. They served the very practical purpose of breaking up the monotony of his melodic lines. They became an integral part of the composer's style. He used them with less frequency in his more mature works, but when he did he wove them into his melodic schemes with great skill.

Another device which he used for propping up melodic interest was the introduction of melodic material in the accompaniment, or even a secondary line of melody between the chief melody and the bass. This last he evolved from his lifelong study of Bach. Among the Nocturnes it is best exemplified by the E flat (Opus 55, No. 2), which is decidedly polyphonic in style. At points where the interest in the melody is likely to droop it is suddenly revived by the appearance of another melodic line just below it, which comes and goes

as needed. This device, and the enrichment of his accompaniments, became increasingly important as Chopin's art developed. Together they give weight and density to many of the masterpieces of his last years.

The composer's skill in adapting technical ideas of this sort to the capabilities of the piano has had an indirect effect of importance. His music is singularly for the piano. It seldom translates successfully into other media. It is the antithesis of Bach's music, which has a universal quality and seems to adapt itself to almost any instrument or group of instruments. Chopin's music is the voice, even (in the most hackneyed of phrases) the soul of the piano. It loses its eloquence when removed to another body.

## VII

Chopin's affair with George Sand is one of the enigmas of music history. It is also one of the curiosities of that dim and murky region of human affections, where even the emotions of normal individuals do not always assume the shapes of reason and expectation. The composer was a prime neurotic, but Mme Sand was an even stranger agglomeration of psychological contradictions. Biographers on both sides have confused the episode in their attempts to fasten the blame for its unfortunate end; writers on Chopin have been particularly virulent in their attacks on Sand, often blackening her out of all proportion to the facts.

She was undeniably one of the most extraordinary women who ever lived. Born Aurora Dupin, she was a descendant of the French militarist, Marshal Saxe, who was an illegitimate son of Augustus II of Saxony. Various other bars sinister ran in her ancestry, a fact which did not deter her family from steering her at eighteen into a loveless marriage with Casimir Dudevant, a dissipated and boorish country squire. She stood it for eight years, then cut loose and went to live alone in Paris. After writing one inconsequential novel in collaboration with a young man named Jules Sandeau (from whom she evolved her *nom de plume*, George Sand) she turned out another novel, *Indiana*, by herself. This book was the wildfire best-seller of its day, and it swept its author into fame overnight. Thereafter, to the end of her long life in 1876, she worked with incredible industry, writing more than a hundred books.

With fame came an even greater measure of notoriety. Mme Sand simply could not live conventionally. She was the great-grandmother of all present-day feminists who have established woman's freedom in a modern world. Even in such minor matters as dress she refused to be bound. When she found that she could roam the streets of Paris unmolested in the dress of a Latin Quarter student, she continued to wear men's clothes whenever she pleased. Later she took to cigars and a hookah. Her divorce action against her husband created a lurid scandal; but she bore it stoically, valuing independence more than reputation. Intellectually she was the peer of most of the men she knew; therefore she demanded the right to live with the same freedom that men enjoyed. This freedom included, according to the viewpoint she developed not long after coming to Paris, the right to love. Her numerous affairs were more scandalous than all her other oddities put together, but the thing that her critics (particularly the male ones) were never able to forgive was her assumption of what had always been man's inalienable right—the privilege of terminating a love-affair. Before she met Chopin she and the young poet Alfred de Musset had been

through a scorching affair. When she left him for an Italian doctor, Musset almost died of damaged pride, and Sand herself was very nearly wrecked emotionally.

None of George Sand's affairs brought her lasting happiness. Her longest association, eight years, was that with Chopin. Throughout her life there ran like a band of scarlet the continual pain of disillusionment and frustration in love.

In January 1838 Balzac spent several days at her country place at Nohant. He recorded his impressions in a letter. "I found Comrade George Sand in her dressing-gown, smoking an after-dinner cigar, in front of her fire in an immense room. She had on lovely yellow slippers ornamented with fringe, bewitching stockings, and red trousers. So much for her state of mind. As to physique, she had doubled her chin like a monk. She has not a single white hair in spite of her frightful misfortunes; her swarthy complexion has not changed; her lovely eyes are as brilliant as ever; she has the same stupid air when she is thinking, because, as I told her after studying her, her whole countenance is in her eyes. . . . She leads about the same life that I do. She goes to bed at six in the morning and gets up at noon; I go to bed at six in the evening and get up at midnight. Naturally, I conformed to her habits, and for three days we gossiped from five o'clock in the evening, after dinner, until five in the morning. . . .

"She is a bachelor, she is an artist, she is big, generous, loyal, chaste; she has the features of a man. Ergo, she is not a woman. . . . It is a man she would like to be, so much so that she left her womanhood and is no longer a woman. A woman attracts and she repels, and, since I am very masculine, if she produces that effect on me, she must produce it on men who are like me. She will be unhappy always. . . . A woman must always love a man greater than she, or she must be so blinded that it is the same as though he were."

The meeting of Mme Sand and Chopin had occurred about a year before Balzac's visit. The composer was twenty-seven; the novelist was six years older. As two celebrities they had anticipated meeting each other, but after their first encounter Chopin remarked, "What a repellent woman that Sand is! Is she really a woman? I'm ready to doubt it." In the summer of 1838 the composer, who had been ailing, was invited to Nohant to recuperate. Before many weeks had passed the most famous infatuation of the age was well under way.

It was also one of the most inexplicable of affairs. The customary explanation relied upon by most writers is that Chopin, the high-strung, sensitive, effeminate man was naturally drawn to a masculine, strong-willed woman, six years older than himself and ready to assume a maternal control over him. But it was not as simple as that. Many contemporary writers describe her as definitely unprepossessing in appearance—a short, dumpy figure, a swarthy complexion like an Indian, a nose too large, and a coarse mouth. As Balzac said, only her eyes—enormous pools of liquid blackness—gave her face distinction. Of beauty, such as a man of Chopin's tastes would be expected to admire, there was none. Moreover, the composer's fastidious nature recoiled from many of her unwomanly habits, particularly the cigars. He was a hide-bound conservative in clothes, in etiquette, in his choice of friends, in his personal conduct—in everything except his music. She dressed herself like a freak, was democratic in her viewpoint, disdainful of conventions of every kind—personal, social, or political. Even in the matter of religion it shocked him to learn that

she did not believe in a literal hell. Nevertheless, these two polar natures were drawn together by the most powerful of all human attractions.

There is no doubt that at first Mme Sand adored Chopin. She called him her angel; she took care of him as she did her own children. She ordered eight of the best years of her life to suit him. His love for her was even greater. It is plain that he literally could not live without her. Yet at first he was somehow ashamed of his infatuation, and was concerned that his family and friends might learn of the liaison. He never dedicated a single one of his works to her.

No one has ever explained these inner mysteries of the Chopin-Sand affair. Nor has anyone ever doubted this result of it: that during those years the "greater Chopin" came into being.

The beginning was marked by disaster. Mme Sand decided to spend the winter of 1838-39 on the island of Majorca, and she persuaded Chopin to accompany her and her two children. He went expecting to find a tropical paradise where he could recover his health in the warm Mediterranean sun. But very soon after they arrived the rains came, and with those torrents all comfort vanished. The composer developed bronchitis. Soon rumours spread among the islanders that he had tuberculosis; threats were made against his life. The Sand party had to leave their villa and take refuge in an abandoned Carthusian monastery in the near-by hills. It was a great, sprawled-out pile of stone, some of it dating back to the fifteenth century—a labyrinth of cells, with walls three feet thick, lofty ceilings and small Gothic windows. Sand and her two children and Chopin occupied three of the cells. The misery of their situation was indescribable. What food they could get was wretched, and the peasants would not work for them, fearing the composer's disease. Chopin, established in a cell (shaped, he said, like a coffin), struggled to go on with his life and his art. He had a broken-down piano part of the time, and he worked at his Preludes, several Nocturnes and Polonaises, and the F major Ballade, the C sharp minor Scherzo, and the B flat minor Sonata, but his health grew steadily worse. Then his nerves gave way. The gloom of his surroundings—the sombre, ancient building isolated in a sea of verdure and drenched in never-ending rain—was depressing enough by day; but at night unnamed horrors and the fear of death clutched him. Mme Sand wrote: "On returning from my nocturnal explorations in the ruins with my children, I found him at ten o'clock at night before his piano, his face pale, his eyes wild, and his hair almost standing on end. It was some minutes before he could recognize us."

After three months they decided to return to France before it was too late. On the voyage back to the mainland the composer had incessant hæmorrhages, and at Barcelona he lost bowlfuls of blood before a French warship's doctor finally stopped the flow. They got him to Marseilles, a walking shadow, but definitely relieved from death. His health mended slowly, and they returned at last to Nohant.

There can be no exaggerating the effect, both upon Chopin and Sand, of the dreadful Majorca experience. It undermined the composer's health; he never again was a well man. More than that, it bound him to Sand with hoops of steel. All through the sojourn her labours for him and for her children had been heroic, and she stood them with courage and fortitude. He was never to be free of his reliance upon her.

Soon a routine of life developed for them: summers at Nohant, the rest of the year at Paris. In the city they did not actually share the same house, but Chopin always lived very close to Sand. Every day, after his hours of teaching

and composition, he appeared at her apartment to assume his accustomed place in her salon. She was then the most famous woman in Europe, and he had also become a public figure. Everyone of artistic or social importance wanted to meet them and be seen at their apartment. There Liszt, Delacroix, Heine, and Balzac mingled with the composer's wealthy and aristocratic friends. Chopin had little vitality, and people were annoyed by his coughing. But in spite of the fact that his life energies were draining away, his creative powers had reached their flood tide.

## VIII

The Preludes are clearly a bridge between the lesser Chopin and the greater. Most of them were written and their publication contracted for before he went to Majorca; he finished and perfected them during the three months on the island. At first there were twenty-four, one in each major and minor key. A twenty-fifth, in C sharp minor, was written a few years later. Thus the title "Prelude" was taken from J. S. Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier", which contains preludes and fugues in each of the major and minor keys. Once he had set down the title upon his page, Chopin's fancy released itself from any fetter of classicism, soaring into poetry of the most romantic sort.

The Preludes are remarkable, first of all, for their brevity. Some of them cover no more than a single page; one, the C minor, is only twelve measures long. This fact, and the wide range of styles and moods that they cover, puzzled Chopin's contemporaries, who could not discern what new form he might be aiming at. One biographer felt that the Preludes were no more than a group of rough sketches from an artist's portfolio, some of them unfinished. The exact opposite was true. In most of them Chopin's aim was simply to show what he could accomplish with a single musical idea—not at length but in brief. Each prelude is like a solitary precious stone, upon which the composer brought to bear the delicate skill of the lapidary. From the facets of each there flashes some particular phase of his varied art: his gift for melody, his scintillating harmonic colouring, his ornamentation, his skill at sounding out all the stops in the piano's range of sonorities. In addition, each one has its own emotional colour—and here too the variety is remarkable. We sample moods of gaiety, sadness, serenity, brooding, fury, despair, and more too subtle to categorize.

Thus the Preludes are actually Chopin in miniature. They are intimate glimpses of the best that he had in him. In this respect they resemble, not the preludes of Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier", but rather the chorale preludes which Bach wrote for his favourite instrument, the organ. There is a quality of personal revelation about them; they lead us closer to the composer's inmost feelings than any other of his works.

Nothing that Chopin wrote has caused more wrangling among music critics than his B flat minor Sonata. This is the work whose slow movement is the familiar Funeral March. The pedants used to dismiss it as not a sonata at all, for the reason that its first movement disregards certain formal rules of structure of the sonata form, and because the three remaining movements did not seem to be related as they should be. Schumann said that here Chopin "bound together four of his maddest children", and that the Funeral March did not belong in the work at all. Even Huneker thought that "in reality, these four movements have no common life".

The public, undismayed by these dicta, has taken the B flat minor Sonata

to its bosom. It is one of the most popular of the Pole's works, and for a long time it was the most frequently played of all sonatas in piano literature. The reason is not far to seek. It contains some of Chopin's most dramatic, passionate, and spaciouly wrought music; and it gives the player opportunity for pianism that is brilliant without descending into self-conscious display. So far as quality is concerned there is only one genuinely weak spot—the lyric middle section of the Funeral March, which is now hopelessly overripe. The rest is Chopin not far from the top of his powers. Few care any more that the first movement omits the first theme entirely from the recapitulation, or any other detail of pedantic significance. The music moves with a wild and clamorous rush that is irresistible. Powerful emotion, perfectly controlled, makes up for any irregularity in formal structure. The Scherzo is tremendous—full of explosive energy and relieved by an unhackneyed lyric section. The Funeral March is admittedly spotted, but in the tolling bells of its opening and close there is masterful tone-painting. Seldom has music achieved such a deep and utter black. The closing Presto is one of the most original things that Chopin or anyone else ever wrote—a weird, enigmatic movement, filled with premonitions of terror. Throughout its entire length the two hands play single notes, an octave apart. These octaves race up and down the keyboard at headlong speed, until individual notes and even harmonic structure disappear as in a grey mist. The movement reminded Rubinstein of night winds sweeping over churchyard graves.

What really binds these four mad children together is a matter of mood—a smell of gloom and death, of tragic and furious desperation which hangs like a pall over the whole work. It comes and goes, giving moments of lyric respite; but the essential morbidity is never absent for long.

Chopin's third and last sonata, the B minor, appeared in 1845, when the composer's health was rapidly going downhill and only a few more works of authentic greatness were left in him. The B minor Sonata lacks the rough, craggy edges, the dramatic impact and the black moodiness of the B flat minor. Instead there is more polish, and a slightly nearer approach to the canons of strict form. There is also a finer lyricism: Chopin did not often surpass the lovely second theme of the first movement, or the entire Largo, with its long-drawn-out melodic lines that have the reposeful beauty of an elegy. The Scherzo is all foam and sparkle, instead of the cleaving, slashing blows of the Scherzo in the previous work. The last movement, compared with the startling Presto of the B flat minor, is almost conventional; but it winds up the piece with a fine technical display for the performer.

Neither of these two works may be great sonatas, in the sense that pedagogues might use them to demonstrate the finer points of sonata construction, but they are both great music. Their failures as pure sonatas are of importance today only to theorists, and to students who gain from them the satisfaction of knowing that even as high ranking a composer as Chopin has his weaknesses.

## IX

Chopin's genius for originality, for taking a form previously established and giving it a new imprint entirely his own, was nowhere better displayed than in his Scherzos. He wrote four solo pieces under this title, to which should be added the two in the Sonatas, making six in all. The old classic use of the scherzo was

to inject a mild element of humour into music. The word originally meant "a jest". Scherzos were light, airy pieces in rapid tempo, from which all seriousness was banned. With Beethoven the form took on bulk. His scherzos were huge bellows of Falstaffian laughter, roaring like gusts of wind through his symphonies. Among romantic composers Mendelssohn wrote some of the most charming scherzos. His were often fairy pieces, light as thistledown, like the incomparable one in his "Midsummer Night's Dream" music. Two of the Chopin Scherzos lean to this type—the one in the B minor Sonata and the superb Scherzo in E major (Opus 54). Curiously enough, these two were the last of his six. It was in the first four that he set the old form completely upside down.

His First Scherzo, in B minor (Opus 20), was an early work, written when he was twenty-five. What fierce corroding ironies were working in his soul when he named this piece "scherzo" we may only guess. It begins with two shocking chords—and then a blast of passion is let loose. No music Chopin had then written, not even his "Revolutionary" Etude, had ever twisted the euphony which was supposed to be music into spiritual warfare so violent. Nothing is left of the classic notion of a scherzo, except the breathless speed with which the piece moves. There is an idyllic middle section, a needed contrast of pure melody from the grinding dissonances; but it does not hold forth for long. The end of the drama is more terrible than the beginning: "Seize on him, Furies, take him to your torments!"

For originality and dramatic power conjoined, the B minor Scherzo deserves rank with the best creations of Chopin's maturity.

The Second Scherzo, in B flat minor (Opus 31), is a far more popular work; it is much more pleasingly melodic and its emotions are constrained to more reasonable bounds. Excessive playing has worn it down for many modern listeners. The Third Scherzo, in C sharp minor (Opus 39), stands at the top of the group. It sprang from the Majorca nightmare. Huneker wrote: "It is a sombre and fantastic pile of architecture, and above it hovers, despairing and perpetual night. It is a tale from Poe's 'iron-bound, melancholy volume of the magi', and on its gates might be inscribed the word 'spleen'." Great imagination went into this C sharp minor Scherzo, and a sure grasp of all the complex mechanics of pianism. It has the malignant strength of the B minor Scherzo, but the hysteria is absent. The composer has his ideas and his emotions in complete control. And Chopin the harmonist is here at his best, splashing his colours with immense verve and daring. Virtuoso pianists relish this scherzo, because it gives them opportunity to draw many brilliant arrows from the technical quiver: furious octave work, massive power, beautiful sequences of chords, and the most gorgeous arpeggio display in all piano music. These are musical pyrotechnics in *excelsis*, yet they never detract from the composer's poetic aims.

The Ballades are a pure Chopin invention. He had no precedent for their form. These pieces have the further distinction of having been composed to a literary scenario of some sort, which was another innovation for Chopin. The union of music with literary ideas, while it fascinated all other romantic composers, did not appeal to him. Even though his music is poetic, dramatic, lyrical to the core, it is still abstract. The Ballades are the nearest thing to an exception. That Chopin wrote them, inspired by works of the Polish romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, is certain. But what the story or even the symbolism of each might be we have no inkling.



Every one of the four Ballades is a strong work, although the lovely Third Ballade, in A flat, has been injured almost irreparably by overplaying. The Fourth, in F minor, is very likely Chopin's masterpiece. It is that fortunate case of an artist cramming on to a single canvas the choicest things he owned in all the various departments of his inspiration and technique. Its melodies are as distinguished as any he ever wrote, with no trace of the marshmallow sweetness that sickens too many of the Nocturnes. The harmonic scheme is a continual shifting of multicoloured lights, relucant and fascinating—the most convincing proof we could ask of Chopin's place as a harmonist of the first rank. The very form of the piece is a triumph for the composer. It is as big as a sonata's first movement, and its design is as complex. Yet this time Chopin did not falter. He pieced his material together with deft smoothness; he organized it with perfect logic. Many other details force themselves upon our attention, but none more than the splendour of the accompaniment material. The left-hand part is enriched and varied with such a wealth of interesting detail that it often takes the centre of the musical stage. Here again Chopin was the innovator. He was marking the turn away from a long-established homophony, with its formula of melody supported by chords, and was breaking up his chords into a new kind of linear counterpoint. This process was later taken in hand by Wagner and developed into the return to polyphony which is one of the salient features of much modern music.

The F minor Ballade has but one rival for top ranking in the catalogue of Chopin's works—the glorious F minor Fantaisie. This work has so much in common with the ballades, in style and spiritual content, in the refulgence of its ideas, that it may well be classed with them. It has the same breadth of design and the same cohesion. Chopin was again wielding the big brush and his muscles were equal to the task. There is a sombre magnificence about the whole work; and, at times, grandeur.

The F minor Fantaisie and the F minor Ballade are twin suns, dominating the galaxy of pieces which marked Chopin's final efforts as a composer. The fantaisie was written in 1841, the ballade in 1842; and round about them, in all the other forms in which he worked, Chopin was turning out masterpieces. Just before them came the F sharp minor Polonaise, the C minor Nocturne, the A flat Ballade; after them came the thunderous A flat Polonaise, the E major Scherzo, a group of his finest mazurkas, the Berceuse and the Barcarolle, and his last nocturne—the redolent E major (Opus 62, No. 2). By 1845 his strength was going fast. That year the B minor Sonata was published, his last work of epic dimensions. There was still one more single movement in the grand style—the Polonaise Fantaisie of 1846. This was the work about which the usually astute Liszt made a notorious error of judgment. Although praising it in part, he thought that it stood, "on account of its pathological contents, outside the sphere of art"—a cryptic reasoning which simply meant that he did not like it but did not know just why. Very likely what disturbed him was the somewhat rambling form of the piece. Chopin used the polonaise form as a mere jumping-off place for excursions into unfamiliar territory, both wonderful and exotic. He leads us on through half a dozen different themes and multifarious changes of key, as his moods veer with the wind. Today—used to the waywardness, the perversity, the often deliberate incoherence of the modern tone poem—we follow Chopin through his adventurous polonaise with ease and delight. If there is a hint of diffuseness in this splendid work the reason may possibly be found in the personal life of the artist, which was then moving towards a crisis. The affair

with Mme Sand, the supporting structure of his whole emotional existence, had begun to crumble under him.

## X

The last chapter in the Chopin-Sand affair is the most confused and obscure of the entire story. Chopin left her in 1847 but no one can fix with certainty the precise reasons or the blame for the breach. The culminating episode was a complex family quarrel at Nohant, which involved Mme Sand and her son and daughter. Chopin, who was in Paris at the time, took sides with the daughter against her mother. Mme Sand was distressed by his attitude, and she wrote him a letter which he may have taken as his dismissal. We do not know the contents of that letter, for Chopin destroyed it after showing it only to his friend Delacroix. The painter noted in his *Journal*, "I must admit that it is atrocious. The cruel passions, the long-suppressed impatiences are having their day." Chopin did not return to Nohant that summer, which was the sign that everything was over between them.

The affair had been disintegrating for several years. The composer's friends insisted that Mme Sand had long been tired of him and that she finally jockeyed him into the position of having to make the ultimate break. It was widely believed that she deliberately caricatured him in her novel *Lucretia Floriani*. Lucretia's lover, Prince Karol, a man with a neurotic and excessively jealous nature, was supposed to be Chopin. The composer had read the book before the quarrel and did not seem to recognize the portrait, until kind friends afterwards pointed it out to him.

Mme Sand's defence was that she had made herself the slave of his whims and his jealousies, but that she could not show him preference over her children. "For seven years," she wrote in confidence to a friend, "I have lived as a virgin with him and with all others. I have become so weary of passions and so disillusioned that even without effort or sacrifice I have grown old before my time. . . . I know that many people accuse me, some of having exhausted him by the violence of my senses, others of having driven him to despair by my coldness. I believe you know the truth." Her pleas in defence are persuasive, until it is remembered that she was both a facile writer and a smooth rationalizer of her own actions, and that even her admirers never classed her as a high priestess of the truth.

Mme Sand has been called everything reprehensible by Chopin's biographers, including "a cormorant, quite unfit as a mate for a man like Chopin". This is extreme. The maternal affection she gave him was precisely what the effeminate part of his nature craved; her solicitations satisfied his pride and his desires for attention. Moreover, her care for him undoubtedly prolonged his life. He might have died soon after the Majorca experience had she not nursed him with the same devotion that she did her children. She saved him for his finest creative years.

But here, precisely, is the crux of the whole affair. Mme Sand had done so much for Chopin, she should have realized that she was duty-bound to go one last step farther. Even if he had become a trial to her, with his jealousies, his neuroses, his sickroom petulance; even if her own motives had been as saint-like as she described them, she still should not have let him go. She must have known that his death warrant was signed anyway. He had tuberculosis of the

larynx, and it could only have been a matter of a few years at the most—perhaps a few months. Had she made an effort to avoid that last breach, no one could ever have accused her. The entire Chopin-Sand affair might have been on the credit side of history. Instead, she is condemned for an act of cruelty, and the issue of their love affair is left in perplexity.

They met only once again. In March 1848 he passed her on the stairs in the house of a friend in Paris. She wrote, "I pressed his trembling and icy hand. I wished to speak to him; he slipped away." In that brief moment he told her that she was a grandmother—that her estranged daughter had borne a child.

It would have been merciful if Chopin's life had ended when the rupture with Mme Sand first occurred. His most vulnerable part, his pride, had been hurt beyond all help. He composed no more. He did not want to live. But for three more years he had to crawl towards death. When the Revolution of 1848 made it necessary for him to leave Paris, one of his pupils, a wealthy Scotch lady named Jane Stirling, persuaded him to go to London. He spent eight months in England and Scotland, lionized by society, but so ill that he shocked everyone who saw him. He was dreadfully emaciated and pale; his back was bent, and he coughed incessantly. He suffered such fatigue that at times he had to be carried upstairs. In spite of his misery he played a great deal, even giving several concerts. His last public appearance as a pianist occurred in London, in November 1848. The occasion was a ball for the benefit of Polish refugees. Most of those present wanted to dance, and when Chopin played nobody listened to him.

Finally he dragged himself away from the chilling fogs of England and went back to Paris, but almost another year went by before he was released from his sufferings. Meanwhile, his money ran out and he was haunted by the fear of poverty, until Miss Stirling sent him secretly a gift of 25,000 francs. A story was circulated that a few days before he died (October 17, 1849), Mme Sand tried to see him, but was turned away by his friends. Careful research has revealed, however, that she was not in Paris at the time. On his death-bed Chopin was heard to murmur, "She told me that I should not die except in her arms."

## XI

Throughout his life Chopin was a jealous guardian of one thing above all else—his reputation as a composer. He made it a rule never to publish anything which did not measure up to his own high standards. Before he died there were in existence numerous manuscripts of works which he considered unworthy—many of them efforts of his student days. He begged that they be burned. His dying wishes, however, were not carried out; five years later most of them appeared in publication. They consist chiefly of mazurkas, waltzes, and polonaises, and—the ill-fated *Fantaisie-Improvisée*. With very few exceptions they prove that the composer's powers of self-criticism were valuably high. So far as their interest to musicologists is concerned the publication of these pieces was justified; otherwise most of them should be ignored. Identification is easy. The last work which Chopin himself published, the Sonata for Piano and Cello, is marked Opus 65. Any work with an opus number higher than that, or any published posthumously without an opus number, is suspect.

# Schumann

1810-56



LYTTON STRACHEY REMARKS ABOUT ONE OF HIS "EMINENT VICTORIANS": "It was as if the Fates had laid a wager that they would daunt him, and in the end they lost their bet." The life story of Robert Schumann reads as if the Fates had laid some such bet upon him, too, and that he had surmounted their obstacles one by one—but in the end they won their bet. They daunted him at last, but only with the cruellest weapon that a man may be brought to face.

The shocks of misfortune with which Schumann had so often to contend had naturally a profound effect upon his mind and character. They had a corresponding effect upon his art, and thus upon the history of music itself. For Schumann was one of those artists who do not create in a vacuum. The work of few composers falls more readily into "periods"—into categories clearly defined by external events which were shaping the course of his life. We may trace in his music the books that he read, the friends that he made, the scenes of life and nature that his eye had fallen upon and loved. More than any other romantic composer he used as the tissue of his art his own highly personalized emotional moods.

On that account the position of Schumann's music in a modern world is full of contradictions. Being, as he was, an archromanticist, we have every right to expect that he would now be as outmoded as an antimacassar. This is an age which is supposed to regard sentiment with the same abhorrence that the devil regards holy water. It lumps together the novels of Bulwer-Lytton and Disraeli, the poetry of Byron, the "Songs without Words" of Mendelssohn, and all the other pressed flowers and scented album leaves of romanticism and pronounces them unfit company for a civilization which includes atom smashers, dissonant counterpoint, and the science of geopolitics. And yet Schumann, with all his unabashed sentiment, his avowal of such romantic inspirations as young love, spring, and the beauty of flowers, goes right on living and blooming—like a patch of violets in the middle of a motor-car assembly line.

It is not hard to find reasons for his music's vitality. The chief one is what might be suspected at once: he was a first-rate melodist. If the history of music proves anything at all, it proves that there is no substitute for melody. People will forgive the lack of many things in music—form, harmonic interest, craftsmanship, even good taste—but they will never forgive a lack of good melody. That is why they will turn away from so much of Berlioz, Bruckner,

Mahler, and Schönberg, and yet treasure far less cerebrally contrived pieces by Verdi, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, and Grieg.

Schumann as a melodist ranks very close to Schubert. He produced his tunes in abundance and in great variety, and yet he knew how to give them a distinction which always raised them above the commonplace. All of his musical procedures had this element of individuality—of saying a thing in a way not quite expected. He was thus an innovator, an experimenter; but never in the large, bold sense that Beethoven was. Rather he was a phrasemaker in music, just as he was in literature. Among musicians he was one of the most able writers about music, and music history and criticism are now studded with quotations from his pen. He was also the master of the small idea in music—the piquant, whimsical touch, the epigram. It was therefore a collation of felicitous detail, projected over the whole field of his art, which gave his music an outstanding character.

Lastly, there is in Schumann's music a certain quality of health. This, too, is a contradiction, for the composer during much of his life was a mental case, and his sufferings were at times dreadful. But that was one phase of his personal experience which he tried to exclude from his art. His music is often melancholy, but it is never morbid. The nerve-ridden pessimism of Chopin or Tchaikovsky found no place in the work of Schumann. Instead there is an air of normality about it, the same sturdiness and vigour that characterizes the music of Bach and Haydn and the more sunlit parts of Beethoven.

## II

Robert Alexander Schumann was born on June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, a town in Saxony. The general region was one of natural beauty and fertility. Musically it was fertile too, for besides Schumann it nurtured Handel, the Bachs, and Wagner. It seemed also to be an ideal spot for war. In 1806 Napoleon routed the Prussians at Jena; in 1812 thousands of his troops streamed through Zwickau, followed one gala day by the Emperor himself, on his way to Poland; and then on another day, a year later, the people of the town (including presumably the three-year-old Robert Schumann) could hear the thunder of cannon from Leipzig, where, at the tremendous Battle of the Nations, Napoleon was being pounded to his doom. That year there was a famine in Zwickau, and typhus, and the horror of maimed and dying soldiers filling the hospitals.

August Schumann, the father of the composer, owned a book-publishing business in Zwickau. He was a fortunate parent for a future man of the arts, for he was a person of intellectual distinction himself. He wrote numerous books, and he was one of the first to publish cheap, well-printed pocket-size editions of the classics; he produced books on business, statistics, geography, and military history, and he made and published translations of English poetry. He was the kind of man who threw himself strenuously into a new intellectual hobby every year, expending quantities of nervous energy, and generally overworking himself. He was immensely interested in Robert's education. Not certain which way the boy's talents might lie, he encouraged him to study both literature and music. At one time he even tried to get the eminent Karl Maria von Weber to give his son music lessons.

It was Robert's first serious misfortune that he was robbed at the age of sixteen of his father's sympathy and encouragement. August Schumann died in 1826, worn out from overwork at the task of translating Byron's *Childe*

*Harold and Beppo*. The boy was a long time getting over the shock. His education now fell into the hands of his mother and a guardian, who straightway proved their obtuseness by deciding that he should study the law. No doubt they thought it the only logical profession for a young bookworm who spent hours poring over Homer, Sophocles, Plato, and Tacitus. At any rate, in the spring of 1828 young Robert Schumann enrolled as *studiosus juris* in the University of Leipzig. This was the second major misfortune of his life. He had no more business trying to plough through the sand-dunes of Saxon law than John Keats had trying to be a surgeon.

As a result he became a prize young prig. Like any other eighteen-year-old freshman who is beginning to feel his intellectual feet, he considered himself vastly superior. He remained aloof from the noisy students at the university, took long walks in the near-by country, stuffed himself with a diet of Greek and Latin classics and the bloated novels of Jean Paul Richter. Whether he realized it or not, he was going through one of youth's worst ordeals; he consoled himself by becoming an intellectual snob. He consoled himself otherwise, too. There was a man in Leipzig named Friedrich Wieck, who was a piano-teacher of unusual ability. It was not long before Schumann was taking piano lessons from Wieck and spending many hours in his home. He even lived there for a time. One of Wieck's children was the nine-year-old Clara—a wonder child whose virtuosity as a pianist was already astonishing.

"My whole life," the composer wrote later, "has been a twenty years' war between prose and poetry—between law and music." From the beginning the law fought a losing battle. After a year in Leipzig the young man decided to try a course at Heidelberg, and on the way he made a short detour through the Rhineland. It was spring. When he came to the river for the first time he closed his eyes in an ecstasy of expectation, and then, "It lay before me—calm, still, grave, and proud, like an old German god, and with it the glorious, blossoming, green *Rheingau* with its hills and valleys and the whole paradise of vineyards." He had a wonderful time; he encountered strange people; he threw off the guise of aloofness and diffidence. And then at Heidelberg, in the very citadel of jurisprudence, the law career of Schumann met its death-blow. He studied there under the renowned Professor Thibaut, who had a massive reputation in the law. Thibaut was the author of a monumental codification of the Roman law; but deep under the crust of his legal learning lay a totally incongruous stratum—a passion for music, especially the art of Palestrina. One almost discerns the hand of Providence at work here: Schumann, led against his will to the law, and then finding the one professor in 10,000 who was also a music authority. In Heidelberg the young man spent far more time at the piano than at the pandects, so the next year he wrote to his mother and begged to be set free. "Jurisprudence so ossifies and freezes me," he pleaded, "that no flower of my imagination will ever again long for the world's spring." He asked that his mother be guided by the opinion of Friedrich Wieck, and Wieck agreed—Robert Schumann *did* have the makings of a great pianist. He suggested, and the young man's mother finally agreed to, a six months' trial.

The twenty years' war was over.

### III

Quite naturally, the man to train young Schumann as a piano virtuoso would be Wieck himself. This pedagogue deserves attention, for he was to play,

through Schumann and his own daughter Clara, an important part in the unfolding of nineteenth-century music. Wieck was forty-three when Schumann met him for the first time, and he had a past which a modern psychologist would examine with interest. He came from poor parents and had had to fight every inch of the way for an education in the ministry. During many of his adolescent years he was actually hungry. In early manhood he suffered painfully from a skin disease of the face. As a minister he preached but one sermon—and then left the Church for ever. He became a tutor, and finally a teacher of music, the thing he really wanted to do. Music thus gained an inspired pedagogue, while the Church lost what would have been a bigot and a fanatic. When he was past thirty Wieck married a girl of nineteen. She stood him for eight years, bore him five children (one the famous Clara), and then divorced him. He must have been a singularly repellent man. He was opinionated and vain, sure of himself and his own ideas. The cruelty in him manifested itself in the form of rudeness. He was a meddler, who loved to put other people to rights, always using the most acid of insults to do it.

Wieck had reason to be proud of his ability as a teacher. He understood the psychology of teaching; he was progressive in his ideas, and his musical taste was fine. At first Schumann admired him. The young man wrote, "You have no idea of his fire, his judgment, his attitude to art; but if he speaks in his own or Clara's interest, he becomes quite savage."

Wieck did not have much chance to prove what he could make of Robert Schumann's talent, for a short time after his career as piano student began the young man did a foolish and tragic thing. At Heidelberg he had been practising on a small dumb keyboard, carrying it with him everywhere. Impatient as usual, he tried still another short cut to finger dexterity. Unknown to Wieck, he used a device which held one of the fingers in a stiff position while the others were exercised. The idea was to gain greater independence and strength for the weaker fingers. The exact opposite happened. One day in the spring of 1832, Schumann suddenly realized that the fourth finger of his right hand was lame. At first he was so shocked that he did not dare to go to a doctor. After months of anguished waiting he came at last to the realization that his finger was practically paralysed and that his career as piano virtuoso was ended before it had even begun.

Schumann's bravery in the face of his many adversities remains one of the most admired aspects of his character. He was never braver than at this moment—a youth of twenty-two facing the ruination of his life's ambition. He spoke very little about his misfortune, and at first he minimized it in his letters. Certain details of the device and the injury it caused remain a mystery. He seems to have decided almost immediately to become a composer. The broken career and the maimed hand were pushed into the background of his consciousness, to be forgotten but to fester. He flung himself into composition. Like the deafness of Beethoven, his personal tragedy became a means of enriching the whole art of music.

At first he began the study of composition with a theorist named Dorn. He went at it with immense zeal, but the lessons did not last long. The young man was so wayward and so disdainful of orthodox procedures that Dorn soon threw him out. Schumann did not seem to care. He declared that the best way to learn was to study the old masters; he went to the works of Bach (which he adored) and analysed them down to the last sixteenth note. Soon his own magnificent first works for the piano began to appear. "Papillons" he had

composed before he gave up the law, but in the eight years beginning in 1832 he produced the Paganini Etudes, the C major Toccata, "Carnaval", the Symphonic Etudes, the "Davidsbündler Dances", "Scenes from Childhood", "Kreisleriana", the C major Fantasie, "Faschingsschwank", three sonatas, a host of pieces under the titles "Fantasiestücke", "Blumenstück", "Novelletten", and many more.

These are all piano works, and they remain among the best ever composed for the instrument. The thing to be noted about them at once is that they are chiefly short works, or collections of short pieces bound together by some poetic idea. This was in the true romantic vein—music fertilized by the literary or the pictorial germ. Thus "Papillons" was inspired by the last scene of Jean Paul's *Flegeljahre* (a masked ball); "Carnaval" was a scene at a fair, a phantasmagoria of real and literary figures; "Kreisleriana" was a representation of Johannes Kreisler, the eccentric Kapellmeister of E. T. A. Hoffmann's novel. Even if Schumann did not have definite stories or pictures in mind when he actually composed some of these works, he often attached them to the music afterwards.

"Carnaval" is typical of his works of this period, beside being one of the masterpieces of romantic piano literature. It is made up of twenty short pieces, each with a fanciful title. Some are persons at a ball—Pierrot, Arlequin, Pantalon, and Columbine; others are real people—Chiarina (Clara Wieck), Estrella (a certain girl named Ernestine whom Schumann once loved), Chopin, Paganini, and Schumann himself under two of his pen names, Eusebius and Florestan. Still others are moods or romantic episodes, rather than people—Aveu is an avowal of love, Reconnaissance a scene of recognition, Promenade a walk at a German ball—and so on.

There is also a technical bond between the members of the cycle. The entire work is built upon a foundation of four notes (A flat, E flat, C, and B flat) which the composer used in three different sequences, and which he indicated in the work itself as Sphinxes. Schumann thought originally of calling the whole thing "Frolics on Four Notes", and he was bemused by the fact that the German letters which represent the four notes are ASCH—the name of a small Bohemian town where the young lady Ernestine lived. Actually this matter of the four notes is of scant importance to the enjoyment of "Carnaval", even though their clever use can be traced, sometimes with difficulty, through the whole scheme. What they do indicate is the whimsical trend of Schumann's mind. Musical puzzles and acrostics delighted him; he loved to be mysterious in a sly way. It was one of the aspects of his humorous, warm-hearted nature.

There is more than humour and fantasy and poetic charm in "Carnaval". As pure piano music it is also magnificent, a wholly unexpected product to come, as Opus 9, from the pen of a young man of twenty-four. It indicated in its time a new and powerful individuality. The basis of Schumann's art, here and in every other great work that he produced, was a profusion of fine melody. "Carnaval" is alive with lovely little tunes, each made fascinating by the composer's unique treatment. Schumann's whole pianistic style had here begun to blossom. Admittedly, it is not the most popular or the most brilliant pianistic style, but that in the long run has been one of its virtues. In his time the whole trend in piano music was towards brilliant technical display and lavish colour. Schumann cared for neither. He avoided the luxuriant ornamentation of Chopin, and the hectic colouring; he avoided Liszt's combination of grandiloquent melody and dazzling trapeze work. With virtuosity as such he would have no truck. He said of his own music that it contained "a fine thoughtfulness



that I would not sacrifice for all Liszt's magnificence"; and of Liszt's, "I sometimes find too much tinsel upon it."

Thoughtfulness is indeed the kernel of Schumann's pianistic art. It is never merely facile. Its aesthetic delights are found not easily, but only after digging in. There lies another of its differences from Liszt's music. Liszt must be interpreted by a player with his technical equipment plus his emotions. Lacking either, it becomes meaningless music. With Schumann there must be added a third element—the intellect. For the performer (or the listener) with a brain he offers inexhaustible pleasure. But it is not on the surface; it is underneath a style which used to be called crabbed and perverse, but which we now know to be one of the most fruitful in modern music.

#### IV

The last piece in "Carnaval" is called "March of the Band of Davidites against the Philistines". The Davidites, or *Davidsbundler*, were Schumann's mythical champions of a new order in music, as opposed to the old fogies and the ignorant. In Leipzig they were personified by a group of young intellectuals who banded themselves together under the composer's aegis to combat the "Philistines". They felt that the general level of taste in music was low, and that the German periodicals devoted to music were conservative, dreary, and venal. In 1834 they founded the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, with Schumann (then only twenty-four years old) as editor. He remained its guiding spirit for ten years, and during that time it became the most famous musical journal ever published.

Most of the composer's large output of literary work first appeared in this magazine. He was an excellent writer. Even today, when most of the music criticism of his time is as hard to wade through as the second-rate novels of the same period, many of Schumann's pieces remain lucid and fresh. He was humorous and fanciful, where others had never been anything but pompous, and he was a master of the epigram; for example:

"He is a good musician who understands the music without the score, the score without the music."

"With Bach nothing is half done, morbid; everything is made as if for eternity."

"The gentlemen of the orchestra . . . taste a new composition as if it were a sour apple."

Of Weber's *Euryanthe*: "It cost him a piece of his life."

Of critics: "Music induces nightingales to sing, pug-dogs to yelp. . . . Sour grapes; bad wine."

It has been noted that Schumann was passionately addicted to the works of Jean Paul. This novelist has long been one of the deflated balloons of German literature, but Schumann ranked him with Bach as a creative artist—a considerable overestimate. The *Neue Zeitschrift* articles are replete with whimsies borrowed from Jean Paul's voluminous works. One was Schumann's habit of writing under the *noms de plume* Florestan and Eusebius, who were taken from the characters Vult and Walt in the novelist's *Flegeljahre*. Florestan was the impetuous, hot-headed enthusiast; Eusebius was restrained, introspective, and gentle—as they are so charmingly mirrored in "Carnaval". Schumann also introduced various of his friends under fanciful titles: Chiara was Clara Wieck, Felix Meritis was Mendelssohn, and Master Raro was Friedrich Wieck.

Schumann's altogether unique style of writing, backed by his progressive ideas on music, made an instant impression on the public, and it was not long before the *Neue Zeitschrift* was known all over Germany. It had a fine effect in raising the general standard of music taste. Schumann deplored Italian opera, which was then overwhelmingly popular, and thus indirectly he helped pave the way for Wagner. He fought hard for Bach, who was still practically unknown, for Schubert, and for the greater works of Beethoven. He was one of the first to praise Chopin. His great discovery, made in his later years, was the genius of the young Johannes Brahms.

## V

Schumann's romance with Clara Wieck is one of the tenderest of nineteenth-century love stories. All its various phases—the slow awakening of love between them, their long separation, the fulfilment of their hopes, their romantic personalities, even the tragic end of their union—all wove themselves into a tale that a Victorian novelist could hardly have surpassed.

When Schumann first entered Friedrich Wieck's house as a dreamy-eyed *studiosus juris* of eighteen, Clara was a little girl of nine. She was already a remarkable pianist, and in a few months she was to make her first public appearance in Leipzig, at the historic Gewandhaus. She was an adorable child, unspoiled and unaffected, for her father had the good sense to foster her talent without straining it. He never exploited her, as Leopold Mozart did his son Wolfgang. After the Leipzig appearance Wieck took her on many tours of German cities, and even as far as Paris. Soon she became the most celebrated prodigy of her day, but her wholesome childhood was never allowed to suffer. She loved music, and piano practising was as natural to her as play.

At first Clara and Schumann paid little attention to each other. The tall, handsome student was in fact very hard to know. He was shy and taciturn, given to long, moody silences. In company he would often stand in a corner by himself, lost in thought, his lips pursed as if to whistle some theme that might be running through his head. Once he went boating with a young lady and sat for an hour without uttering a word. Then suddenly he pressed her hand and said, "Now we understand each other perfectly." His silences and his moroseness were not a pose; they may have been the first manifestations of the derangement which later took root in his brain.

As Schumann gradually came to know Clara he began to watch her career with interest; he romped with her, told her stories, wrote her occasional playful letters. In later life Clara said that she had begun to love Schumann when she was twelve, but it was several years after that before he suddenly realized his own feelings. One night, shortly after her sixteenth birthday, Clara and her father were preparing to leave on a long concert tour, and a disconsolate Schumann came to say good-bye. As he left their house she followed him down, holding a lamp to light the way. At the foot of the stairs he turned and suddenly took her in his arms.

That romantic scene on the stairs was followed by the cruellest of awakenings. To the lovers' amazement Clara's father objected—and with all the pathological obstinacy that his nature could summon. He ordered Schumann out of his house, forbade Clara to see him or to receive any of his letters, and even took her to Dresden to separate them. Of course Schumann followed her, and when

Wieck heard of it his anger became a blind insanity. He threatened to shoot the composer if he dared go near his daughter again. The next four years became a nightmare for the two lovers. Clara tried dutifully to carry out her father's wishes, and for months at a time she and Schumann heard of each other only indirectly. Wieck meanwhile began spreading slander about the composer, aiming to blacken him in Clara's eyes. It is clear that he did not want her to marry anyone; he feared, of course, that it would ruin her career. He said, "The idea of Clara with a perambulator is preposterous."

The four years of separation were a torment to Schumann, the worst thing that could have happened to one of his unhealthy mental state. So far as his character and his art were concerned, however, the effect was different. Clara, and the struggle for her, made a man of him. He cast aside his priggishness and his intellectual affectations. His seriousness was now real, his emotions less tinged by sentimentality. In his music he worked from a depth of inspiration that he had never reached before. To these years belong the C major Fantasia, "Kreisleriana", the "Novelletten", the "Davidsbündler Dances", the "Fantasiestücke", "Faschingsschwank", and the "Scenes from Childhood". Schumann said that he composed the last work because of a remark made by Clara—that in some ways he seemed to her like a child. With the subtle simplicity that hides art he created a dozen or more of these little pieces, each like a tiny drawing which captures for a moment some attitude of an evanescent childhood. They have become hackneyed, imitated, mauled out of shape by overplaying since the day of their composition (e.g. the charming "Traumerei"); but they remain the first and best of their kind.

The C major Fantasia was the first product of the composer's separation from Clara, for it was written in 1836. It is his finest piano work, and it has a double significance: as a piece of pure romantic writing it may stand with the best of Chopin, and as an example of spacious tonal architecture, with the Beethoven sonatas. It is in three big movements. The first is rhapsodic and impassioned, with many changes of mood and style. The second is a magnificent march. The third is the slow movement, one of the most serious and deeply felt that Schumann ever wrote. The impress of Beethoven is marked. Schumann had at first planned this work as his contribution to a monument to Beethoven, to be erected at Bonn, but then the original idea got lost somehow as the music evolved. He later wrote Clara that she was its inspiration—which is a good example of the way the creative ideas of composers sometimes wind up in territory entirely different from that in which they began.

In the Fantasia Schumann's peculiar and somewhat involved style of piano-writing reached its maturity. The composer's intense study of Bach shows itself clearly. In certain places there is a strong impression of polyphony—not at all of the eighteenth-century type, but an entirely new kind, of which Schumann and Chopin were to be the early exemplars. The left hand no longer plays a mere subordinate part. Its chordal structure is continually broken up into secondary themes and inner voices, which must be separated from and balanced against the chief melody. The right hand is often given two different melodic strands instead of the usual one. These and numerous other technical problems serve to make the Fantasia one of the most difficult of Schumann's works, both for the hand and the intellect of the performer. It is a virtuoso piece which makes no concession to mere display.

In August 1837, Clara gave a recital in Leipzig. Schumann was in the audience. He had been separated from her for months and was no longer sure

of her feelings, but after she played his own Symphonic Etudes there was no room for doubt. Love had found a way to convey its secret messages. Clara herself said, "I had no chance of showing you my inmost heart. I could not do it in private so I did it in public." The next day they became formally engaged. But the struggle with Wieck had only begun. For three years more he tried to put them off with evasions and postponements, until Clara was forced to leave his house and strike out on her own. She was still a minor and under his control, which finally made it necessary for Schumann, as a last and terrible resort, to bring his case before a court of law. Wieck meanwhile went about spreading vile slanders, accusing the composer of drunkenness and even attacking the morals of his daughter. It is known now that he might have had a real grievance had he objected to Schumann on the grounds of incipient mental disease; but of this he made no mention, probably because no one at that time suspected it. From Wieck's abominable actions the inference is clear that Clara was more to him than a daughter to be protected, more than a wonder child who represented his own especial triumph as a teacher. One may catch momentary glimpses of the same passion which motivated the father of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

The lawsuit dragged on for a year, but when the decision finally came it was in Schumann's favour. He was completely vindicated. The lovers were married on September 12, 1840, the day before Clara's twenty-first birthday.

## VI

The year of Schumann's marriage is more in music history than the anniversary of a romantic event in the life of a great composer: 1840 was what Schumann himself called his "Song Year", for in that short space of time, and in a perfect blaze of inspiration, he turned out more than a hundred songs. Among them are many which belong with the finest in the whole range of German *lieder*.

It is often considered curious that Schumann, with his love of poetry and his own exceptional literary endowments, should have waited until he was thirty before writing songs. The answer is found in his own statement, made as late as 1839: "I have always considered songs as being on a lower level than instrumental music, indeed I have not looked upon song as a great art"—an attitude typical among composers before his own and Schubert's time. Once he had got over these lofty ideas of his youth he turned to song-writing with frenzied intensity. In the course of a single day, early in 1840, he turned out twenty-seven pages of music. He was then working on the group of songs (Opus 25) which he presented to his bride on the eve of their wedding. He called them "Myrthen", myrtle leaves being the equivalent of orange blossoms for German brides. It is doubtful if any man ever matched this wedding gift of Robert Schumann's, for "Myrthen" contains such masterpieces as "Widmung" ["Dedication"], "Der Nussbaum" ["The Almond Tree"], "Die Lotosblume" ["The Lotus Flower"], "Du bist wie eine Blume" ["Thou Art like a Flower"], and "Du meine Seele" ["Thou Art My Soul"].

After "Myrthen" the stream of beautiful songs continued, both singly and in cycles. Practically all of the hundred or so that he produced in that year are worth while; at least half of them are superlative. The "Liederkreis" ["Song Cycle"], Opus 39, contains among others "Intermezzo", "Waldesgespräch"

["Lorelei"], and two lovely night scenes, "Mondnacht" ["Moonlight"], and "Frühlingsnacht" ["Spring Night"]. Opus 42 is the celebrated cycle of eight songs, "Frauenliebe und Leben" ["Woman's Life and Love"]. The verses by the poet Chamisso recount the various phases of a woman's love life—her meeting with her beloved, the courtship, betrothal, and marriage, the birth of her child, the death of her husband. Schumann's treatment of this theme is inspired throughout; his cycle is one of the few worthy of a place beside Schubert's "Winterreise". Opus 48 is the great "Dichterliebe" series, a group of sixteen songs after Heine. It contains, among many sovereign examples, "Ich grolle nicht" ["I Chide Thee Not"]. Few songs are more admired, few more often sung. "Ich grolle nicht" has bred by itself a whole literature of imitations—dozens of *lieder* which have copied the splendid expansiveness of its melody, its pulsing accompaniment, and its expression of unreserved sentiment.

In the final evaluation of Schumann's contributions to the art song he can be compared only to Schubert, for only Schubert surpassed him. Schumann built solidly upon the foundations of his predecessor, but he also made important advances. He set a new standard in the care he took with a poet's words. He paid scrupulous regard to prosody (a thing Schubert did not always do), and he fitted his music to the poetic idea with such skill that the one seems to be the very image of the other. Hardly less inspired was his treatment of the piano part. Something unusual could be expected here, for Schumann was already a master of piano-writing before he attacked the song. His piano parts (especially in the greater songs like the "Dichterliebe" series) are so varied, so rich in independent ideas, that they can hardly be called mere accompaniments. They become rather a collaboration. The composer's attitude towards the piano is plainly indicated in his frequent use of elaborate postludes, in which the instrument continues for a number of measures after the voice has finished.

For the singer most of Schumann's songs are a challenge. The composer had plunged headlong into song with very little preparatory study of the human voice, and his procedures are not always what vocalists call "grateful". In addition his songs are an intellectual test, just as his piano music is. The singer who can master them may lay claim to a considerable distinction. Sometimes they yield up their secrets only after long searching and the hardest kind of study, for Schumann's mind was a subtle instrument, not at all the vessel of naive sentimentality that many used to suppose. He was never more subtle than in some of his songs.

After the astonishing freshet of the Song Year the composer said that he was satisfied with what he had accomplished, but that he did not think he would ever write songs again. Unfortunately, he did write many more. A decade later he turned out still another hundred or so, but the contrast in quality with the first series could not be wider if they had been the product of two different brains. As a matter of fact they were, for by that time the composer's mental faculties were going fast and he had left but a few more years of sanity.

## VII

From the beginning of 1840 Schumann had been working at top speed, under the forced draught of a furious inspiration. At the end of the year he suddenly dropped his songs and turned to the orchestra. During 1841 he produced nothing but orchestral works—his symphonies in B flat and D minor, sketches

for a C minor Symphony which he never completed, the Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, and what later became the first movement of his Piano Concerto. Then in 1842 came another switch, this time to chamber music. In that year he composed his three string quartets, the Piano Quartet, the Piano Quintet, and the *Fantasiestücke* for violin, 'cello, and piano.

With the completion of his Song Year, Schumann had come to a fork in the road. He took the turn away from his purely romantic procedures, from music impregnated by poetic ideas, and went over in the direction of classicism. Now it was the abstract forms which absorbed him, and though his music was still saturated with his essentially romantic style, the literary fancies of his former days were conspicuous by their absence. Gone were Florestan and Eusebius and the other whimsies of Jean Paul; gone were Chiara and the *Davidsbündler*, the masked balls, the carnivals, the sweet-smelling garlands of romantic song. They were left behind with the composer's own romantic youth.

Schumann's First Symphony in B flat was begun late in 1840, a few months after his marriage to Clara. He worked at it with such concentration that it was finished before the end of the following February. He called it his "Spring" Symphony. The D minor Symphony which he completed the following September was actually his second, but because he revised it ten years later it was published as his fourth. These two symphonies, and the two which Schumann wrote in later years, have gained a unique reputation in symphonic literature. They are almost as famous for their shortcomings as for their virtues. Inept orchestration is their prime defect. Schumann was in fact the prince of bad orchestrators. Practically all of his works in this medium have been edited and refurbished by later experts; to this day many conductors continue to make extensive alterations of their own in the scoring.

Schumann's failure as an orchestrator resulted partly from his method of work. He composed best in sudden bursts of inspiration, when the urge to get his ideas into concrete form, regardless of obstacles, simply could not be resisted. Half of the time he did not wait to prepare himself in the technical side of what he was doing. He began the B flat Symphony knowing almost nothing about instrumentation. His dogged perseverance and his boundless enthusiasm carried him roughshod over every handicap. Schumann never would have worked this way if he had not also been curiously unconscious of his medium. In his symphonies there are innumerable passages which sound entirely out of place coming from an orchestra, but which would be splendid on a piano. This weakness he never overcame; it was clearly a blind spot in his creative consciousness. Schumann was thus the antithesis of Chopin, whose music suits its particular instrument like a glove fits a hand.

Schumann was also lacking in a sense of colour. This too was unfortunate, because even in his day his music was in competition with the first splendid examples of modern musical colour—the brilliantly prismatic orchestral works of Berlioz, Liszt, and the early Wagner, and the piano music of Chopin. Schumann never did keep pace with the discoveries of these men, for the reason that he did not understand what they were about. As a result his orchestral works often sound today as if they needed a new polish—something to give them the glow of a more modern orchestral colour.

In the face of these various shortcomings one might wonder why the four Schumann symphonies have not gone the way of those by Ludwig Spohr. Instead they are still established fixtures in the repertoire of every symphony orchestra, and through the years their pages show no signs of yellowing round

the edges. They continue to give delight for the same reasons that the composer's piano works do. First-rate melodic ideas, beautiful schemes of harmonization, rhythms that are fresh and buoyantly irresistible (in spite of the fact that they would often be even better on a piano), a sense of romantic ardour suffusing the whole—these are the essentials, here as in every other phase of his art. These and the ability to avoid the commonplace and the expected. Even when he transgressed rules of technical practice, Schumann made up for it with style and good taste. It is interesting to note in this respect how far his work has outlived the bulk of Mendelssohn's, whose technique was infallible but whose lack of taste often left on his music the spots and bruises of a fatal overripeness.

Almost everything that has been said of Schumann's orchestral works of the year 1841 can be repeated for the chamber music of 1842. The composer went at his new task with the same intensity, and to the exclusion of everything else. He wrote his three string quartets in a space of eight weeks; the last, in A major, was struck off in five days. He also plunged into this new medium without any too much preparation, although he said that he first shut himself up for a spell and studied the Beethoven quartets. Because of his haste he had to make many revisions in his quartets in later years. In all of them the piano style is still too much in evidence. Nevertheless, one of these quartets, the A major which he wrote in such incredible haste, is a masterpiece. It is the same Schumann of the greater piano works and the songs, simply translated into a new medium.

The Piano Quartet (for piano, violin, viola, and 'cello), and the Piano Quintet (for piano and string quartet) represent one of the composer's most successful musical innovations. In combining these two different mediums he had few precedents. He had to feel his way. The Piano Quartet is entirely successful; the Quintet is both great and famous. Here Schumann hit upon an ideal union for piano and small string group. Pedagogues have found various ways in which he might have improved his handling of the two mediums, but few could suggest improvements in the music itself.

### VIII

The marriage of the Schumanns has always been regarded as the perfect one. In the joint diary which they kept, in their letters during the periods of separation, there is no mistaking that their union was the life and soul of each. Schumann's happiness is clearly indicated in his immense creative activity during the first three years. He composed as a man possessed and inspired. Clara's affection for her husband was a blind adoration. She could see no weakness in his character, no flaw in his art. In the course of a decade and a half eight children, four boys and four girls, were born to them. Nevertheless, Clara found the time and energy to make many public appearances. Often they were a matter of necessity, as the strain on their finances increased.

Clara's true greatness, both as woman and artist, began with her marriage. She grew out of a girlhood of simple sweetness into a woman of unbending strength of character, equal to the strain of a long public career and a burden of personal sorrow that few are called upon to bear. On sheer merit she won a place beside Liszt, Thalberg, and the other virtuosi, at that time no small feat for a woman. Schumann's chief contribution to her development was in the improvement of her musical taste. He helped her weed out of her repertoire

the flashy tinsel pieces of Herz, Thalberg, Henselt, and even Liszt; he taught her instead the gospel of Bach and the Beethoven of the big sonatas. This was a procedure clearly against the popular taste; it was in fact an unheard-of thing when Clara first played an entire Beethoven sonata at a public concert. One of her happiest privileges was the introduction to the public of many of her husband's works.

Schumann's long period of intense creative activity, which had begun with the Song Year, came to a climax in 1843, when he produced a huge cantata, "Paradise and the Peri", for solo voices, chorus, and orchestra. It was an exhausting task, and it left the composer in a disturbed mental state. The next year he and Clara set out on a four months' tour of Russia, to bolster up their finances. A Russian journey in midwinter was full of unforeseen difficulties—wretched inns and coaches, long drives by sleigh through regions of endless desolation inhabited only by wolves, cold that was excruciating. In that land of iron twilight and brooding icy darkness a deep melancholia settled upon the mind of Schumann. He was considering an epic idea, music for Goethe's *Faust*. When they returned to Leipzig he set to work, only to suffer a complete nervous collapse.

Once before, when he was a young man of twenty-three, Schumann had suffered an illness almost as alarming. There had been one particular night of horror when he had gone to the edge of suicide, and for weeks afterwards he was afraid to be alone. Now his mental depression was even worse. He could not sleep, he was tortured by all sorts of imaginary terrors, and he wept incessantly. Clara took the only advice that the doctors could offer—a change of scene—and late in 1844 the Schumann family removed to Dresden.

The precise nature of the disease which slowly disintegrated the composer's brain and nervous system is not known; modern diagnosticians are still left in doubt. But the record of the next twelve years, until his death in an asylum, is a story of almost unbelievable suffering and of heroic fortitude. The effect upon his art constitutes in itself one of the tragedies of music history. It is true that to the earlier part of this period belong several of his finest works—the last two movements of the Piano Concerto, the symphonies in C major and E flat major, the "Manfred" Overture—but for the most part what he produced were ghost pieces, done in a dull whiteness and removed from the body of his genius. Had Schumann's mental suffering been the result of psychological disturbances, as Beethoven's was, and Tchaikovsky's and Mussorgsky's, the effect might have been totally different. The anguish of these men projected itself into their music, morbidly it is true, but with the effect of sharpening rather than dulling their creative ideas. Schumann's disease was organic, and the effect upon his art was deadly. He wrote enormous quantities of music, and in almost every known form—for various chamber combinations, piano duets and solos, organ pieces, over a hundred songs for solo and mixed voices, several huge choral works, an opera, a Mass, a Requiem—but the melancholy fact is clear that much of the time he wrote not under the press of inspiration but as a distraction from the tortures that were swelling within his brain.

Schumann was practically an invalid when they arrived in Dresden, in December 1844. He suffered not only from mental depression but from a mysterious skin trouble which he described as "a hundred places itching and twitching". As a hope of distraction, Clara persuaded him to try exercises in fugue writing. They would both take the same fugal subject, work it out alone, and then compare and correct their efforts together. For Schumann this



became a fascinating game and a means of getting him back on the way to temporary health.

It was in Dresden that Schumann encountered Richard Wagner at close range. They had known each other casually in their student days in Leipzig, and Wagner had contributed several pieces to the *Neue Zeitschrift*. In 1844, Wagner was thirty-one years old, and he held the post of Kapellmeister at the Court Theatre in Dresden. There he had produced his *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman*, and he was now preparing for the première of *Tannhäuser* in 1845. The social intercourse between the two composers was something less than a spectacular success. Schumann recoiled from the neurotic, egotistical little man with an enormous head, who talked incessantly about himself, his music, and his grandiose ideas on art and aesthetics. Wagner in turn complained that he could get nothing out of a man who went for hours without uttering a word. When Wagner presented him with a score of his forthcoming *Tannhäuser*, Schumann studied it and pronounced it clever, but unmelodious and full of technical mistakes. After he heard it performed, however, he withdrew his criticism and admitted that it had moved him deeply. It almost goes without saying that Wagner did not care for Schumann's work. He thought it stodgy and unadventurous. The two composers by this time were travelling in opposite directions. Wagner was moving forward; he had in fact hardly made a beginning in the revolutionary procedures which were to influence every composer who came after him. Schumann had already made the turn back towards the past. He had begun as a pure romantic, but now he was immersed in the old classic forms. Compared with Wagner, his influence in the future was to be small. After the death of his heir, Johannes Brahms, it would practically disappear as a moving force in music.

The first work of importance which Schumann was able to complete at Dresden was his Piano Concerto. He went back to a Fantasia in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, which he had written four years before, and added to it a second and third movement. Clara played it for the first time at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in January 1846; and on that occasion she had the honour of introducing to the world the most beloved work yet written in that form, and from almost every viewpoint the most successful. In this concerto the many diverse elements in Schumann's art are brought together in perfect fusion. It is primarily a showpiece (as every concerto is by its very nature), yet it is written in impeccable taste; it is so romantic in style that its ideas flow with rhapsodic freedom, and yet it has a splendid underlying structure of classic form; it is as fragrantly sentimental as a packet of old lavender, but it remains one of the least dated works in nineteenth-century music. For once Schumann delivered a piece of orchestration which requires (for him) a minimum of tinkering to make it sound like something, while the writing for the piano is magnificent throughout.

Felicities of melody and style are strewn lavishly through the score, but there is one which cannot go unnoted—the cadenza at the conclusion of the first movement. The original purpose of a cadenza, as it developed in early eighteenth-century concertos, was to give the soloist an opportunity to display his skill at improvising. Down to the beginning of the present century the art of extemporization was part of the equipment of every musician of consequence. The test supreme was the cadenza in a concerto, when the soloist's dialogue with the orchestra came to a dramatic pause, and he was permitted to take off on a daring solo flight. Unfortunately, the result was more often

than not a blotch on the face of the piece as a whole. Beethoven indicated his opinions on the subject by writing out his own cadenzas for his E flat Piano Concerto. It was Schumann who really put an end to the custom of free improvisation. He produced for his Piano Concerto a cadenza which remains the model both for inspiration and taste, and one of the few which is a joy rather than an ordeal for the listener. The fact remains that even written cadenzas, though an improvement on improvisation, are still too often a mistake. A good one is the hardest part of a concerto to write, and more musical rubble has been dumped into this form than into any other, not even excepting arias for coloratura sopranos. Schumann's, by contrast, is spun so beautifully from the main ideas of the work that it becomes not a separate and disturbing entity but a part of the texture of the concerto itself; yet its style is such that a capable pianist can make it sound very much like an improvisation.

While he was at work on the concerto, Schumann remarked in a letter to Mendelssohn that for days "trumpets and drums have been sounding in my head—trumpets in C. What will come of it all I do not know." Once he had got the concerto out of the way, the composer set down on paper those clear-sounding trumpet Cs, and around them he wove the noble opening measures of a symphony—the Symphony in C major. If ever a work of art were produced "amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow", it is this crown of Robert Schumann's symphonic endeavours. It required many months of labour, and again and again the composer had to put it aside, when his mental and physical pain became unbearable.

The C major Symphony is more than Schumann's best; it is the best symphony produced by any composer in the whole half century that stands between Schubert's C major and the C minor of Brahms. In the orchestration the composer's sins are often grievous but not beyond forgiveness or repair; and in one movement, the Adagio espressivo, he achieved a piece of instrumentation that is actually inspired. It is well that he did, for this Adagio is a creation of profound and moving loveliness. It has superb lyric contours; it is the type of long-breathed, impassioned singing which Schumann could do so poignantly. Looking backward into his profuse past, and then into the bleakness of his future, one may perceive that this slow movement was the point of his highest development.

After the C major Symphony, Schumann turned again to his massive project, the "Scenes from *Faust*", and these occupied him, along with many other works, until 1853. Meanwhile, in 1848, he fell a prey to the distraction which afflicts so many composers who ought to know better. He tried his hand at writing an opera. Like Beethoven and Schubert, he was doubtless attracted by the handsome perquisites that only a successful opera can offer, but like them he ended up on the hard rocks of failure. His *Genoveva* was produced in Leipzig in 1850 but it enjoyed only a *succès d'estime*. Today it is merely another tombstone in the overpopulated operatic graveyard.

More fruitful than either *Genoveva* or the *Faust* scenes was the music which Schumann composed to Byron's *Manfred*. In spite of the fact that Byron did not intend his dramatic poem for actual stage presentation, the composer made an attempt to adapt it, with appropriate music. The attempt was a failure, and the work as a whole found few performances after Liszt staged it at Weimar in 1852. (There was a presentation in America which must have been memorable—that of the Philharmonic Society of New York, in 1869, when the entire score was played and Edwin Booth read the text.) What survives of Schumann's

"Manfred" today is a single magnificent fragment—the Overture. In addition to being the composer's best piece of orchestration, it is musical portraiture of a high order. The composer himself, like Manfred, had already "supp'd full with horrors"; so it is not strange that he was able to cast into this sombre music much of the essence of human despair.

## IX

In 1850 a well-meaning friend of the Schumanns persuaded them to move to Düsseldorf, where the composer was offered the post of conductor of an orchestral and choral society. By this time he had gained a considerable reputation in Germany, and his appearance with his celebrated wife created a stir in the Rhineland town. They were fêted and serenaded, and it appeared at first as if the new post would be one of congeniality.

At Düsseldorf Schumann produced his last symphony, the "Rhenish", in B flat. This work was inspired by a trip to the city of Cologne, a few miles up the Rhine, and specifically by a ceremony which he witnessed at the great Cologne Cathedral. The occasion was one of the most solemn and gorgeous of all church services—the elevation of an archbishop to the rank of cardinal. Schumann's imagination took flight. In a sudden renaissance of his old romantic spirit, he struck off the handcuffs of the classic rules and constructed a symphony in five movements instead of the usual four. The fourth movement he marked, "In the Character of an Accompaniment to a Solemn Ceremony". This is the so-called "Cathedral Scene"—a slow-moving choralelike chant in the brass and woodwind, in effect a romantic impression of the ancient church ritual. The appearance of so unorthodox a movement in a symphony puzzled Schumann's contemporaries; even the faithful Clara admitted that it was not quite clear to her. Today it remains one of the composer's more impressive symphonic movements, and the only dismay it engenders is with the brass players, who are called upon to unravel some knotty problems of technique. The rest of the symphony is notable for its copious use of folklike tunes and rhythms, supposedly reminiscent of the Rhine Valley.

The composer's revision, in 1851, of his early D minor Symphony was his final work of consequence. He went back in memory to the first year of his marriage, to those halcyon days of midsummer when he had worked hard on this symphony to finish it in time for Clara's birthday. At its first performance it had fallen flat, and he refused to publish it. So now he took it up again, and with a mature hand he recast it. One of the changes that he made was to omit a guitar from the Romanze; in place of this youthful indiscretion he substituted strings pizzicato. The symphony appeared as his fourth, although in point of time it was actually his second. Certain innovations of form, rather than of musical content, have made the D minor Symphony a kind of lesser landmark. The four movements are not separated by pauses. They are intended to flow one into the other in a continuous stream. Moreover, some of the themes appear in various guises in several of the movements. One of them is a kind of motto theme, and is woven through the work with considerable technical skill. Schumann's aim was obviously to achieve some kind of organic unity between the four parts of a symphony, a problem which had bothered composers for a long time. His was a fairly simple solution (he had a precedent, of course, in the last two movements of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony); but it is noteworthy that

at first he thought of hedging on his rash procedures by calling the work a "Symphonic Fantasia". Since the D minor Symphony was published these innovations have become a common practice with symphonic composers.

The post at Düsseldorf proved to be the worst thing that could have happened to Schumann. He had no natural gifts for the task of conducting, and yet he attempted to take over a musical organization which had a fine background of leadership and training. After a fairly successful first year a chill of disappointment spread over the musical circles of the town. Clara soon sensed it, but she shut her eyes to it, and to her husband's growing disabilities. By this time a new torture had been added to his sufferings: he imagined that a single note was sounding continuously in his ears. His speech had become thick and his bodily movements slow. His attempts at conducting became an ordeal for the chorus and the orchestra. At times he would stand before them with raised baton, and then remain lost in thought, forgetting to start; or he would continue to conduct long after the music had stopped.

"My music is silenced," he finally wrote in the spring of 1854. The sound of notes ringing in his ears had become so intolerable that he had to give up all but sporadic attempts at composition. With the last vestiges of his failing mentality he turned to a literary project that had been in his mind for years. He began compiling his *Dichtergarten für Musik* (*The Poet's Garden of Music*), an anthology of allusions to music by the great poets of the ages. It was never finished. Every noise that he heard now sounded to him like music, "a music more beautiful, more finely coloured in instrumentation than has ever been heard on this earth". One night he imagined that Mendelssohn and Schubert came to him, bringing him musical themes.

On February 26, 1854, there was a carnival in Düsseldorf, and in spite of a heavy rain the streets were filled with people dressed in the grotesque costumes of a masquerade. A man appeared in the crowd, wearing a long green dressing-gown and slippers. He was bareheaded, and the rain was dripping from his hair. He ran out upon a long bridge and flung himself into the Rhine. Men in a passing boat got him out of the water; and then they recognized the music director, Dr. Schumann. A week later he was taken to an asylum at Endenich, near Bonn.

Schumann was kept there for more than two years, until his death on July 29, 1856. In all that time Clara was not permitted to see him, until two nights before he died. His sufferings had changed him so that she was scarcely able to recognize him. But he smiled at her, and with a last effort put his arm round her.

She wrote, "I would not give the memory of that embrace for the world's treasures."

## X

The chronological facts of Schumann's life would seem to indicate that he was one of those artists who mature early, do their best work in their twenties and thirties, and then reach a point of sterility in middle age. But in his case we cannot be sure, because his mental deterioration coincided with the decline in his art. There is no way of knowing whether or not, granted health, he could have gone far beyond the great work he had accomplished before he reached forty. If he had, there is interest in the speculation as to what he might have achieved—what splendid works would have followed the C major Symphony,

the Piano Concerto, and the "Manfred" Overture—instead of the pile of dank, unloved scores that he did produce. We have a slight hint, for Schumann died leaving an heir. In a sense, it was Johannes Brahms who carried on where Schumann left off.

The two composers met only a few months before Schumann's attempted suicide. Brahms, a shy, unknown youth of twenty, came to the Schumanns' house in Düsseldorf with a letter of introduction. His eyes were a brilliant blue, and his straight blond hair fell almost to his shoulders; underneath a shabby exterior there was something of the aspect of a young god. He had hardly touched the piano and the opening bars of his own Sonata in C major before the older man sensed the faint current of divinity. For weeks after that the Schumanns could not get enough of this wonderful young man and his music. Schumann then made the boldest prediction in music history. He had not written for the *Neue Zeitschrift* for ten years, but now he contributed an article called "New Paths". It was his last literary effort, and his most potent, for it announced to the world the genius of Brahms. Schumann made no reservations: Brahms, he said, was the great new talent for which music had been waiting; he was not an artist who had to go through slow stages of development, but one who sprang, like Athena, fully armed from the head of Zeus. It was a stroke of unparalleled prescience, for Brahms was still hardly more than a boy and he had written but a handful of songs, piano pieces, and chamber works. "New Paths" made a stir all over Germany. It caused great irritation among the champions of Wagner and Liszt; it was a source of embarrassment and even a handicap to Brahms himself.

Writing elsewhere of his "young eagle", Schumann said, "I should dearly like to be at his side on his flight over the world"; but he did not live long enough to witness more than the first trials of those sturdy pinions. However, the effect of Schumann's musical ideas upon Brahms was profound. In the stream of music the one body flows directly into the other. Young Brahms inherited part of the older man's style, his romantic ardour, and to a minor degree certain of his weaknesses. Brahms's supreme accomplishment was along that road which Schumann had taken shortly before death stopped him; he arrived, from beginnings of romanticism, at the loftiest classicism of the later nineteenth century.

More than his music, Schumann bequeathed to Brahms the devotion of Clara. She outlived her husband by almost forty years. For a time, after her bereavement, she and Brahms were inseparable companions. He worshipped her, and thus it became her privilege to inspire a talent greater even than that of her beloved Robert.

# Wagner

1813-83



THE SHIP WAS THE *Thetis*, A TINY MERCHANT VESSEL BOUND FOR LONDON FROM the Prussian harbour of Pillau, on the Baltic Sea. She made ready to sail one day in July 1839 with a captain, a crew of six, and two passengers. These last were a young German opera conductor and his wife. They had come aboard secretly, and they hid themselves below decks until the ship cleared. They had no passports. The cockleshell of a ship was overcrowded without them; nevertheless they brought along a huge Newfoundland dog which had to be hauled up the ship's side. The crew of the *Thetis* looked upon them with disfavour and even superstition.

The young man was strikingly odd in appearance—only a few inches over five feet in height, but with an enormous head. His nose was large and Teutonic, his forehead broad, his mouth a straight firm line which any reader of character would know meant determination of a high order. Most salient feature of all was his eyes. They were a brilliant, luminous blue, and so piercing and alive that everyone who knew him remarked about their fascination. He was an intensely nervous man, and he talked too much. His wife was a pretty young woman, a few years older than he—quiet, pleasant-tempered, and modest. She had been an actress.

The couple came from Riga, the Livonian city far up the Baltic Sea, where for two years the young man had been the conductor of the town opera. It was a dreary experience and he finally lost his job. They had to get out of Livonia (which was then under Russian rule) like two criminals escaping from prison, for the reason that they did not dare apply for a passport. That would have brought down upon them a horde of creditors, the young man having contrived in his short stay in Riga to run up bills and borrow money from a remarkably large number of friends, acquaintances, and tradesmen. They fled in a coach down to the Prussian border, and at a lonely outpost got themselves smuggled across the frontier, even racing across the final dividing ditch at risk of being shot by Cossack sentries. At Pillau they got aboard the *Thetis* for an eight-day voyage to London, but their final destination was to be Paris.

The young man's real ambition in life was not conducting but composing operas. To anyone but himself his prospects of success in Paris could not have appeared bright. He was going to the most celebrated operatic centre in Europe, where even French composers had to have extraordinary luck and

ability to get their works performed ; yet he was an unknown German who had written but two operas and part of a third. Only the second had been performed ; it was given but once and the performance was a fiasco. Nevertheless, he was certain that the unfinished work (it was based on Bulwer-Lytton's novel, *Rienzi*) was sure to be a success in Paris—once he could get there, finish it, and bring it to the attention of the authorities of the Paris Opera.

Obviously this young man was blessed with self-confidence and assertiveness in copious quantities ; he was, in fact, so sure of himself that at the age of twenty-two he had bought himself a large red note-book in which he carefully recorded all the details of his life for reference in future years when he would be writing his autobiography.

The voyage of the *Thetis* lasted not eight days but three and a half weeks, and it was a horror which the passengers never forgot. As they coasted through the Skaggrak and into the North Sea they were beset by storms so violent that they were driven several times off their course. The captain had to seek shelter in Norwegian fiords, and once the little ship almost foundered when she struck a reef. The two passengers were in torment from seasickness and fear. During one thunderstorm the poor wife went almost insane with terror, and she begged her husband to tie her body to his so they would not be separated when they drowned.

They reached London at last, on August 12, 1839 ; and the *Thetis*, sturdy little ship that she was, brought safely to port one of the most precious cargoes that she or any other ship of her time ever carried. For her passenger was Richard Wagner—the young Wagner, carrying in his enormous head the seeds of the intellect which was to become a *sequoia gigantea* among the creative minds of the nineteenth century. This was Wagner standing in the doorway of the most incredible career in music—a life in which the contrasts of privation and luxurious indulgence, of steady year-by-year defeat and final overwhelming victory, of personal venality and unswerving artistic idealism were combined to an extent that would stagger the imagination of a Hugo. This was Wagner, the great “anarch of art” and the crowning phenomenon of the whole romantic movement. More words would be written about him than about any other composer of his age ; whole libraries would be devoted to his life, his ideas, his works ; the controversies which they would raise would be unmatched in violence and would not be resolved within a space of a hundred years. What he accomplished in music, the extent of the metamorphosis he caused both in its technique and its aesthetic, was so profound that it still defies final evaluation.

## II

His life at its very inception is a matter of controversy. He was born in Leipzig on May 22, 1813, supposedly the son of a police actuary named Karl Friedrich Wagner. Six months later the father died, and the mother married Ludwig Geyer, an actor. There is strong evidence that Geyer was Wagner's real father. A considerable pother is still going on in musicological circles over this insoluble mystery, largely because Geyer had a slight strain of Jewish blood in his ancestry. It used to be supposed that this strain was considerable, which would have been ironical, since Wagner became in later life a bigoted anti-Semite. Whatever the truth, Geyer's influence upon Wagner as a child was important. He was a man of more than ordinary intellect. Besides

acting with one of the better German theatrical troupes, he wrote plays, and he also made a fair name for himself as a portrait painter. Geyer died when Richard was eight years old.

The most significant grain of fact in the boyhood of Wagner was his early passion for poetic drama. He read the plays of Shakespeare and decided to become a dramatist. He then wrote a play in which all twenty-two characters were killed off, so that in the last act he had to bring them back as ghosts. At this time his interest in music was secondary, until he happened to hear some of Beethoven's orchestral works. He was so moved that he decided that his play would need incidental music and that he would write it himself. He went so far as to borrow a text-book on music from Friedrich Wieck, the father of Clara Schumann, who had a lending library in Leipzig at that time. Later he began to study music theory in earnest, but he probably learned most from his personal studies of Beethoven's scores—the piano sonatas, quartets, overtures, and symphonies. He was so mad about Beethoven that when he was seventeen he copied out the full score of the Ninth Symphony and made an arrangement of it for piano—a long and arduous task. No other such arrangement then existed in print, so he offered it to Schott, the publishers, who rejected it.

When he was twenty-one Wagner got a job as conductor of a small opera company in the town of Magdeburg. It was one of the numerous fifth-rate, faded, half-bankrupt troupes which travelled among the less important German towns that could not support theatres of their own. The more dismal features of life with this company did not depress young Wagner's ambitions; it was in the following year that he purchased his red book for the autobiographical notes. He also finished his first opera, *Die Feen* (The Fairies), which was never produced during his lifetime; and he began work on his second, *Das Liebesverbot* (The Ban on Love), which was a perversion of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* into an operatic comedy in the style of the contemporary Italians.

When he was twenty-three Wagner married an actress named Minna Planer. This was one of the most unfortunate mistakes that the history of the marriage institution has to record. Wagner was attracted to Minna with an infatuation that is common among highly sexed, wildly imaginative men. He pursued her until she finally gave in to marriage. Not long afterwards she ran away from him. He was in misery for months, imploring her to come back; when she did he freely forgave her affair with another man.

There had been previous indiscretions in Minna's life. When she was sixteen a man named Einsiedel entered the pages of history by seducing her. She bore a daughter, Natalie, the shame of whose parentage was concealed by Minna by the simple expedient of passing the child off as her sister. Wagner knew this, but he too kept the secret for years. Natalie herself did not learn the truth until she was an old woman.

These irregularities in Minna's life had little or nothing to do with the failure of her marriage to Wagner. She was a plain sort of woman of limited intelligence, who would have made an average German hausfrau. With every year that passed her husband's mentality expanded, until not only his ideas and his music but his simplest actions became incomprehensible to her. Minna was consumed by jealousies and Wagner by irritations which ruined her life and festered his.

After two years at Magdeburg the opera company collapsed into bankruptcy. One of its final performances was the dismal première of *Das Liebesverbot*. Wagner took up his next post at Königsberg, far off in East Prussia, and from



there he went on to two years at Riga. The crows of despair were sitting on the young man's battlements all through these years of hack conducting in grim old eastern towns. It seemed that he was being pushed farther and farther from the European musical centre of gravity into the dank spaces of Prussia and Russia; he was beginning to stagger, too, under a load of debt. The only thing that kept him going at Riga was his work on the opera *Rienzi*. By the summer of 1839 he had almost completed the first two acts—and then he made his great resolve. He had lost his job as conductor, so he decided to give up his conducting career entirely and devote his life to the composition of operas. The flight from Riga and the voyage on the *Thetis* was thus his first leap into the dark. It was the most critical single decision of his entire life.

### III

The reason why Wagner chose to go to Paris rather than back into Germany had to do with the unsatisfactory state of operatic affairs in his native country at that time. All the German operatic composers were on the horns of a two-pronged dilemma. The German public not only refused to believe that its own composers could write as good operas as Italians or Frenchmen, but it refused to see that they were paid decently for their work if they did prove it. From the time of Mozart German composers had been trying to break the stranglehold of Italian opera in their country; the idea of an opera that would be a "truly Germanic work of art" had haunted Mozart years before it did Weber, Marschner, and Wagner himself. Weber's *Der Freischütz*, first produced in 1821, was remarkable both because of its new "romantic" style and the fact that its subject matter was as natively German as beer and black bread. It created immense enthusiasm, but it could not change overnight habits of thought that had prevailed for generations.

Wagner himself became one of the strongest forces in the awakening of the German people, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, to a realization of their national strength, both political and intellectual; yet it is ironical that as a young man he actually had to leave Germany because he felt it was useless to try to get a hearing for his work in his native land. Brooding over his unhappy job at Riga, he came to the decision that the only way he could get his *Rienzi* produced in Germany would be to get it produced first in Paris. The Paris Opera was then the most powerful institution of its kind in Europe; if *Rienzi* were performed there every opera house in Germany would demand it with sheeplike acquiescence. Wagner also hoped that it would get him out of debt. At the Paris Opera a composer was paid a royalty on every performance of his work, but in Germany the opera houses paid him only a single fee (usually miserably small) which gave them the right to perform his work for ever after without royalty.

And so Wagner and Minna and the Newfoundland dog betook themselves to Paris in the fall of 1839 as a roundabout means of assaulting the recalcitrant managers of the opera houses of Germany. As it turned out, they had far better have stayed at home. Wagner accomplished none of his aims in Paris, but he suffered two and half years of privations so cruel that he spoke of them forty years later with tears.

The chances were heavily against him at the Paris Opera, which at that time was not much more than a malarial swamp of the arts. Fashionable prestige

with the aristocracy of Paris, liberal perquisites from the state to pay for its extravagances, a management with a notable lack of artistic foresight or conscience, and a method of operation which made it (in Ernest Newman's phrase) "one third temple of the Muses, two thirds antechamber to a seraglio", had vitiated the Opera of any true artistic purpose. It was both brilliantly meretricious and dull in the grand manner. In the endless coils of its intrigue, musical and social, a new personality or an unfamiliar idea had no more chance than a rabbit in the embrace of a snake. Dominating the entire institution was Giacomo Meyerbeer, son of a wealthy banker of Berlin, who had come to Paris in 1826, and, within a decade, given it two of the biggest successes in French operatic history—*Robert the Devil* and *The Huguenots*. Meyerbeer's particular brand of opera was what the public of Paris craved in copious quantities, and it was the style which young Wagner was trying hard to imitate in the writing of *Rienzi*.

By a lucky chance Wagner got to see Meyerbeer himself. The older man listened while Wagner read him the libretto of the first three acts of *Rienzi*; he found it admirable, but of the music he praised only the composer's handwriting. Later Wagner got an audition for *Das Liebesverbot* before a committee of the Opera which included Eugène Scribe, Meyerbeer's prolific and enormously successful librettist. Wagner accompanied the singers himself on a piano, but after the gentlemen had listened solemnly they told him in effect to sell his papers elsewhere.

It was not long before the poor young German was struggling desperately for his next meal. He wrote articles for the Paris musical journals and he did hack jobs for a music publisher. These included making arrangements of entire operas for various instruments—for piano (two hands and four hands), for two violins, for voice and piano, and even for the cornet. At that time the cornet was a new instrument, enjoying a poisonous vogue in Paris similar to that of the saxophone in America decades later. Wagner ploughed through reams of stuff of this kind—labour that was backbreaking and stultifying.

At the same time he was struggling to finish *Rienzi*. He worked at home in a miserable apartment, going out every fourth day for exercise. He went round Paris in worn-out clothes and shoes full of holes; there is strong evidence that he was jailed for a time for debt. The dog Robber deserted them, a sore blow to Wagner, who was pathologically fond of animals, but Robber doubtless had to find a home where the rations were more plentiful. The composer himself became ill of a gastric disorder which was to plague him for the rest of his life.

In November 1840 he completed *Rienzi*. Realizing that a Paris production was out of the question, he sent the score to the Dresden Opera. At the same time he addressed a letter to the King of Saxony imploring him to order its performance. Months went by, and in the spring of 1841 Wagner wrote a sketch for a new opera, *The Flying Dutchman*, based on a legend of the sea which had been churning in his mind since the voyage of the *Thetis*. Then in June came the electrifying news that *Rienzi* had been accepted for performance in Dresden. The lift to the young man's spirits must have been enormous. He set about the task of *The Flying Dutchman* with terrific concentration, finishing it before the year was out. The music was actually composed in a space of seven weeks, during August and September 1841.

In April 1842, after two and a half years of concentrated misery, Wagner and Minna sat weeping in a coach that took them through the gates of Paris. Ahead of them was Dresden—and the real beginning of Wagner's career.

## IV

The première of *Rienzi* took place on October 20, 1842, after many postponements. The task of its production was an enormous one, and Wagner was lucky that the Dresden Opera spread itself lavishly. More than 500 new costumes were made for the principals and supernumeraries, new stage settings were built, and the singers included two famous German stars—a *heldentenor* named Tichatschek, and Mme Schröder-Devrient, who was the Flagstad of her day. The composer himself supervised every minute detail of the production.

The première turned out to be a success so immense that even Wagner, arch-optimist about anything concerning his own work, was stunned with amazement. As the long five-act work began he sat like a man in a trance, his eyes glazed and his face green with fear. He had grossly underestimated the length of the piece; it began at six in the evening and did not end until midnight. But with every act the enthusiasm of the audience increased until the end was a triumph. The opera continued to run for months, and the news of its success spread all over Germany. People even travelled from neighbouring towns and cities to see it.

Musically speaking, *Rienzi* is the poorest opera that Wagner ever wrote. Every bar of every opera that he composed after it is still living tissue, but with the exception of the Overture, *Rienzi* is dead. Wagner's purpose had been to imitate the master of the Paris Opera, and it has often been said that in *Rienzi* he "out-Meyerbeered Meyerbeer". The truth is that the music of *Rienzi* falls far short of Meyerbeer's best. The only thing of outstanding merit is the Overture which, for all its slam-bang style, is a shrewdly constructed piece. It has dramatic drive, piles climax upon climax with skill, and shows imagination if not much taste. Thereafter the score is a collection of clichés, most of them Italian rather than Meyerbeerian. The general form is conventional—arias, duets, trios, quartettes, and choruses interspersed with recitatives. No character, not even that of *Rienzi*, comes to life. The ballet is music that would disgrace a first-year music student.

What made *Rienzi* a success was not its music, but its combination of music and spectacle. Wagner was attracted to Bulwer-Lytton's story of Rome in the fourteenth century because it gave him the chance to load his stage with the very stuff that had made opera in Paris "grand". The work is a three-ring circus of stage effects. There are scenes before the Church of St. John Lateran, in the Capitol, and in the Roman streets; there are processions of monks and priests, pageants of ambassadors, troops of soldiers, mobs of men, women, and children; there are trumpet-calls, organ-playing, and chanting in the distant church (a forecast of *Die Meistersinger*), and great bells tolling (a forecast of *Parsifal*); there is a ballet, an off-stage battle, and a funeral march; at one point *Rienzi* makes a grand entrance on a horse, and at the end of the last act the Capitol falls in flames. This was Wagner the showman gorging himself (and his audience) with scenic splendour and masses of people—to the accompaniment of roaring choruses and some of the loudest orchestration written up to that time.

With a success like *Rienzi* on its hands the Dresden Opera naturally wanted more of Wagner, so in great haste preparations were made for the production of *The Flying Dutchman*. Its première occurred on January 2, 1843, only ten weeks after that of *Rienzi*. It was a failure. After four performances it had

to be withdrawn, the public demanding *Rienzi* instead. What had happened was the first appearance of the difficulty which dogged the composer most of the days of his life. Wagner's art never stood still; from *Die Feen* to *Parsifal* it grew and changed and intensified, which meant that his life was a continual process of educating musicians, singers, impresarios, and the public itself to an understanding of what he was about. They had scarcely begun to appreciate one phase when he was ready with something new.

*The Flying Dutchman* is miles beyond *Rienzi*. It is a fascinating study in the embryology of music, for it contains the rudiments of practically all the ideas which Wagner would later use to revolutionize opera. It also exhibits many of the idiosyncrasies of his mature style, of which there was heretofore no trace in his music.

The libretto itself is indicative of a complete reversal of the composer's ideas. *Rienzi's* subject was historical (in the manner popularized by Meyerbeer); *The Flying Dutchman's* is legendary, and many of the details of its story are Wagner's own invention. The basic legend is that of the Dutch mariner who swore an oath that he would double the Cape of Good Hope in the teeth of a storm. For his blasphemy he was doomed to sail the seas for ever until he could find a woman willing to sacrifice her life to save his. Wagner's opera begins with a landing by the Dutchman on the coast of Norway, a respite he is permitted every seven years. He meets Senta, a girl who has been deeply moved by his story. She promises to marry him. The Dutchman later learns that Senta was betrothed to another man and has broken her vows; believing her fickle, he sets sail again in despair. As his ship sails away Senta throws herself into the sea, faithful to him even to death. The ship then disappears and the spirits of Senta and the Dutchman she has redeemed are seen to ascend heavenward.

In the handling of this story Wagner made his first step towards the ideal for which he was to wage a lifelong campaign—the changing of opera into what he called "music drama". His overpowering impulse, as it began to develop in *The Flying Dutchman*, was to make the drama the focal point of the artist's effort, with the music simply a means of expressing the emotional, poetic, and pictorial details of the story. The failure of *The Flying Dutchman* in Dresden was due to the bewilderment of both the public and the performers at Wagner's first tentative steps towards this new idea. The new opera had none of the circus pageantry that had glutted *Rienzi*; it had a few choruses, but they were justified by the dramatic situations; there was comparatively little singing of the purely theatrical order. Instead of the glare and bombast and pseudo-Roman brilliance of *Rienzi*, it exposed a short, swiftly moving drama played by a few characters, amid the gloom of a Norwegian fiord.

The music of *The Flying Dutchman* is incomparably finer than anything the composer had yet done. The musical mind of Wagner had never really entered the story of *Rienzi*. The music of that opera is remote from any real suggestion of the characters or their setting of fourteenth-century Rome. It is stencil stuff that opera composers of that time all used to represent certain dramatic situations. But in *The Flying Dutchman*, Wagner actually got his music to expressing, unmistakably and with swift original strokes, the essence of his drama. His score is saturated with the sounds and smell of the sea, the darkness of the north and the fury of the storms that pursued the Dutchman; it depicts the characters and follows their story vividly.

The score also contains the real beginnings of Wagner's scheme of leitmotifs, or "leading motives", which later became the nervous system of his entire

musical style. He devised short musical phrases which were suggestive of a character, or a mood, or a dramatic situation; he used them again and again in the course of his opera, weaving them into the texture of the music whenever the character or mood or situation rose to a dominant place in the drama. Wagner had used leading motives in a fragmentary way even in his three earlier operas, but in *The Flying Dutchman* they take real shape and importance. The first of them is a masterpiece worthy of his maturity—the bold blast of the horns in open fifths with which the Overture begins—a motive suggesting the Dutchman himself.

*The Flying Dutchman* is still performed today, although infrequently. It is not a popular opera, largely because it has been dwarfed by the works which came after it, and because its musical texture, although full of originality, is still crude. Wagner was in the throes of a struggle to cast off the influence of the Italian lyrical style and develop one of his own. *The Flying Dutchman* is a mixture of both. By far the finest thing in the whole work is the Overture. This, too, is spotted; nevertheless it is a superb concentration of the drama that follows. In a few pages the composer outlines the despairs and yearnings of the condemned mariner, the compassion of Senta, their ruined hopes, and their final redemption—all framed in the roar and fury of the sea and the screaming of the wind. When this stunning seascape was first exposed, on the second day of the year 1843, the audience which had come expecting other things did not suspect that a revolution had been let loose in the theatre.

## V

Shortly after the production of his two operas Wagner was made Kapellmeister of the Dresden Opera. His yearly salary was 1500 thalers (about £220) for life. Had he been a differently constituted man he might have used this job as a sinecure, gone on composing *Rienzi* and ended up the German equivalent of Meyerbeer. Already he was being lionized in Dresden, and his fame was spreading through Germany with stories of the success of *Rienzi*. He accepted the post of Kapellmeister, but only with misgivings. *The Flying Dutchman*, failure though it was, had given this thirty-year-old, slowly developing genius a sudden realization of the strength that lay in the thews and sinews of his imagination.

He remained for six years in Dresden, hard at work but fundamentally an unhappy man. With every year that passed his frustrations grew; his mind, gathering strength as it developed, reached out in all directions—wanting to change, to improve, to re-create. He had no patience with the routine performances of watery Italian works at the Dresden Opera. He wanted to conduct only the finer German works—those of Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber. When he performed *Iphigenia in Aulis* he refurbished it completely, ridding it of a half century of conventional excrescences. He tried to revitalize the personnel of the orchestra, and to reseat it; he wrote a long report to the King of Saxony with plans for a more efficient operation of the entire institution. His plan was turned down as too visionary, when as a matter of fact it was both sensible and practical. To this restless, bitterly sincere, furiously energetic little man the opera house was not merely a glorified vaudeville show, but a temple where a new art could be made to flourish. When he could not pull the men who ran it out of their conventional ruts he was baulked and maddened.

The unflattering portraits of this composer with which biographies are now loaded begin with him at Dresden : Wagner the exhausting talker about himself and his ideas ; the nervous, intense, and irritable man with the eyes of a fanatic and the cruel mouth of a zealot ; the paragon of conceit who was so opinionated that the slightest disagreement with his ideas excited and exasperated him.

Wagner's great work during the Dresden period was the composition of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*. The idea for *Tannhäuser* first came to him in Paris. On the journey from there to Dresden in the spring of 1842 he and Minna passed through the little town of Eisenach, to the south of which is located the Wartburg, the illustrious old castle where the medieval minnesingers were supposed to have held their song contests. At that moment Wagner conceived the idea for the third act of his opera. After the production of *The Flying Dutchman* he set to work, first writing a poetic libretto of his own.

According to his story, Tannhäuser, a young minstrel, has lived for a year with the pagan goddess Venus. Satiated with sensual pleasures and knowing that his soul is endangered by his sins, Tannhäuser breaks away from Venus and returns to the country of the Wartburg. He rejoins the minstrel knights and takes part in the celebrated Tournament of Song. But he scandalizes the company with an outburst in praise of the profane love he enjoyed with Venus. The knights threaten to kill him, but he is saved by the pious Elizabeth, who loves him. He goes to Rome with a band of pilgrims to seek forgiveness from the Pope, but later returns a doomed and broken man. As he dies at Elizabeth's bier word is brought of a miracle at Rome which is the sign of his redemption.

After a poor première at the Dresden Opera (October 19, 1845), *Tannhäuser* suddenly turned into a success. The public of Dresden liked it as well as they had *Rienzi*, and within a few years it drew audiences all over Germany. Today, after a hundred years, it is still one of the most popular operas in the entire repertoire.

It is all too easy to underestimate *Tannhäuser*. This is largely because it cannot stand anywhere near the immense works of the composer's maturity. Parts of it are now unpardonably banal (e.g. the March in the second act and the "Evening Star" song in the third) ; its pompous and overdone Teutonic style and a too-easy fluency of some of its melodies spoil it for many listeners today. But a work of such vitality cannot be dismissed for these flaws alone. *Tannhäuser* has first of all a fine dramatic structure. Wagner had developed as a dramatist since the days of *Rienzi*. He had learned how to use and, even more important, how to conserve his effects. *Tannhäuser* has a bacchanal, a march, a song tournament, and many imposing choruses. At bottom these are Meyerbeer's grand-opera effects, but Wagner worked them into his story with reality and justification, and he used them with restraint. As for the music, old-fashionedly romantic though much of it is today, it supports the drama with remarkable fidelity. No other composer of his time could have painted these pictures in music as surely and as brilliantly as Wagner did. And none would have even attempted to portray as he did the psychological states of mind of the various characters.

In *Tannhäuser* appears, for the first time in this composer's music, one of the most salient features of his whole art—sensuality. Wagner the man was a sensualist to the core. His nature was permeated both by the desires of sex and the sybaritical pleasures of life—the caressing sounds and perfumes and textures that appeal to the born voluptuary. It was thus no accident which drew him to paint in music the scenes of the Venusberg and their hold upon

Tannhäuser; it was the strongest side of his whole nature bursting at last into expression. Never before *Tannhäuser* had music expressed passion with such urge and vividness. It is the most powerful and original feature of the entire score. For Wagner it was only a beginning. He had in reserve ideas which would make even the fires of Venus and her sirens and the bacchantes cool by comparison.

*Lohengrin* was finished about three years after *Tannhäuser*. Wagner's method was the same as in the previous work. He chose a Germanic legend, manipulated it to suit his purpose, and wrote from it his own poetic libretto. The scene of the opera is Antwerp in the tenth century. Elsa of Brabant is accused by Count Telramund of murdering her brother. She is saved when Lohengrin, a knight in shining armour, appears in a boat drawn by a swan. Lohengrin offers to protect and marry Elsa on condition that she never ask his name or where he came from. He then defeats Telramund in battle. But the latter plots vengeance with his wife, Ortrude. After the marriage Elsa makes the fatal mistake (prompted by Ortrude) of breaking her promise and asking her husband's identity. Lohengrin sadly tells his story: he is the son of Parsifal, one of the knights of the Holy Grail. As he leaves Elsa for ever his swan is changed into her brother, who had been a victim of Ortrude's sorcery.

The story of *Lohengrin* is less convincing than that of *Tannhäuser*. Its Germanic sentimentality and its medieval superstition, overlaid with the sugar of chivalry, are now faintly ludicrous; while the character of Elsa is too insipid to inspire much sympathy. Admitting these weaknesses, the opera is still a long stride beyond its predecessor. The score of *Lohengrin* is by far the richest musical texture that Wagner had yet spun. It glows with exquisite harmonic schemes and finely spun melodic threads; the whole piece has a shimmer, a golden aura suggestive of its subject. The vocal writing and the handling of the orchestra are masterly throughout.

In this opera Wagner moved still farther towards his music drama ideal. A system of leitmotifs is fairly prominent. The set numbers of the old-style opera have practically disappeared. Instead the music moves in one continuous flow as it follows the action on the stage. There are still vestiges of the old recitative and of the aria (in "Elsa's Dream" and "Lohengrin's Narrative"), and the composer did not forget the purposes of the Paris Opera in his many brilliant choruses, the wedding scene, the bombastic introduction to the third act, and in a considerable overdose of trumpet fanfares.

The Prelude to *Lohengrin* must be set apart from everything that the composer had written up to that time. It is an unqualified masterpiece, and the first appearance of the mature Wagner working under inspiration of the highest order. To set the mood of his story the composer depicts a vision of the Holy Grail as it descends from the heavens, dazzles the eyes with its ethereal beauty, and then disappears. To gain this effect, the composer worked out an ingenious technical design. The piece is based on a single prolonged crescendo and a shorter diminuendo. The music begins in the highest reaches of a few violins; as it drifts slowly downwards towards the middle and bass registers all the other instruments gradually make their entrances, enriching and broadening the whole scheme into a blazing climax, and then moving upwards again to thin out and disappear in the high strings. The golden tapestry which Wagner created with these means is one of the richest sounds in music. It is the first of a long series of tone pictures with which the later works were to be studded.

Wagner finished *Lohengrin* in August 1847 (he wrote the Prelude last), but

the work was not produced at Dresden. Nor was the composer present at its première at Weimar, in 1850, under Liszt's direction. He did not hear a performance of the opera until 1859, twelve years after its completion. What happened meanwhile was a complete upheaval of the composer's life which drove him out of Germany, a political exile hunted by the authorities.

The Revolution of 1848 had repercussions all over Europe, finally reaching Saxony in the spring of 1849. For many months the young Kapellmeister of the Dresden Opera had been one of the leading spirits of a group of liberals who were drumming for an overthrow of the monarchy. He had written pamphlets and made speeches, and when the storm broke in Dresden, Wagner risked his life for several desperate days in the barricaded streets. But the revolution was crushed, and among the warrants that were posted for the arrest of the ringleaders was one dated May 16, 1849, for the "Royal Kapellmeister, Richard Wagner".

He was never caught. He and Minna had fled to Switzerland.

## VI

The early years of Wagner's exile from Germany are the great interregnum of his career as a composer. With the completion of *Lohengrin* he had created the finest romantic opera yet written in Germany. There was not another composer alive who could offer him any real competition in his field, and he knew it. Yet he did something which must have seemed incomprehensible to his admirers, and, to a woman like Minna, sheer insanity. He stopped writing music altogether. For six years he composed nothing at all. Instead he devoted his time to the writing of a huge body of prose works.

His political banishment had nothing to do with this radical action. It appeared later that he was in a long period of gestation during which his next musical work—a gigantic creation—was slowly taking shape in his mind. That work was *The Ring of the Nibelung*. He was not yet ready for the task. It was too enormous and too far outside the boundaries of any known concepts of the musical art. Wagner could not remain silent about it; he had to talk. He had also to find a valve for the release of his enormous mental energy. And so several of the six years between the completion of *Lohengrin* and the start on *The Rhinegold* were taken up with a geyser of literary work, most of it elaborate theorizing on the subject of music, opera, and the drama.

Anyone reading the life story of Richard Wagner can only regard this six-year period with admiration, both for the man's courage and his intellectual strength. It is one of the things which compensates for the thick defamatory coating with which his character is plastered today. That there was an unpleasant side to Wagner the man is undeniable, and the fact that the calcium lights of modern research play heavily upon it today is largely his own fault. In the later years of his life he sat down with his second wife (Cosima Liszt von Bülow Wagner) and dictated his autobiography, *Mein Leben*. This large, two-volume work was published in 1911, long after his death. It proved to be the worst mistake that Wagner ever made. He could not foresee that the fashion in biographies would change and that the public would prefer about the great dead not a velvet-lined Victorian eulogy but a dissection, performed by a psychiatrist with a hatchet in his hand. He could not foresee that hundreds of biographers, critics, and musicologists would seize upon his words, compare them with other



records, and prove him not only an egomaniac but a liar as well. His story is in fact flooded with untruths, evasions, and misinterpretations about many of the people he knew and many of the vital events in his life. It has raised enormous clouds of controversial dust, making the real truth about him difficult to discern.

The biographer, Ernest Newman, whose work is a model of thoroughness and impartiality, has spent years at the task of clarifying the Wagner data contained in other biographies, in the composer's own writings, and in his thousands of letters; and even Newman leaves many issues in Wagner's life in doubt.

Wagner's detractors have made the most, probably, of his debts. He was the high priest of borrowers. Nobody has ever been able to figure out exactly how much he borrowed in his lifetime, but it must have been several thousands of pounds. He very seldom repaid. He borrowed at Magdeburg and Riga and Paris, and on up to Bayreuth. He borrowed from his relatives, from his friends, and from singers in the opera companies; he borrowed from Liszt, and from the husband of at least one lady with whom he was in love; he persuaded another lady to give him a regular income. Finally, as a grand climax to the art of raising money, he borrowed huge sums from one of the European kings. Reading his letters, it would seem that half his time was spent at this melancholy and often desperate business.

One of the chief reasons for Wagner's money troubles (as so many writers have been careful to point out) was his pathological extravagance. His creditors were always aghast at the luxuriousness of the houses and apartments he chose to live in; his homes were always lavishly furnished and generally there was a lovely garden. At Dresden he had a magnificent library and an expensive piano, which he had to leave behind him when he escaped. When Liszt visited him at Zurich the pianist was startled by the splendour of the furnishings, the thick carpets, and heavy silk draperies—strange surroundings for a man with no visible income. The Wagner wine-cellar was always full, with plenty of champagne. Whenever he brought out a new opera or book or poem, a small edition was expensively printed and bound for distribution among his friends. He loved gold watches and he spent a small fortune on his clothes. He could not bear to have coarse fabrics next to his skin, hence his large wardrobe of silk underwear, velvet dressing-gowns, coats, and caps.

There was a reason for this craving for luxury, beyond pure sybaritical desire. Partly it was Wagner's curious means of stimulating inspiration for his music. Composition, as he described it, was a kind of dream state, in which he was submerged in a twilight world removed from reality. Wrapped in a brocaded dressing-gown, in a richly furnished room that was softly lighted and heavy with perfume, he was in a Nirvanic state where the world's harshness could not touch him. "This was Wagner's way," writes Newman; "for other men it may be opium or wine, or tobacco." Thus for all the thousands of pounds that he squandered on luxuries he repaid the world a thousandfold with what he produced.<sup>1</sup> It was either borrow or—literally and artistically—starve. If he had fewer moral scruples than Mozart and Schubert did, the art of music is infinitely richer for the fact.

Wagner's relations with the various women in his life are another rich vein for opprobrium. His treatment of Minna was often inexcusable. The crowning piece of callousness (as Newman points out) was his sitting down over *Mein Leben* to write with his second wife of the weaknesses of his first, who was by that time dead. Minna's worst troubles with him began shortly after the flight

from Dresden. He fell in love with an Englishwoman named Jessie Laussot, who was married to a Swiss. Wagner visited her at Bordeaux and tried to persuade her to elope with him to the Near East. A few years later began his famous infatuation for Mathilde Wesendonck, the wife of one of his wealthy benefactors. This affair tortured Minna to the point of insanity. The next major affair was with Cosima, who was the daughter of Liszt and the wife of Hans von Bülow, two of Wagner's dearest friends. Cosima left her husband, lived with Wagner, and bore him three children before they were finally married, in the closing years of his life.

The root of Wagner's troubles with women was in all probability frustration. He was highly sexed; he craved the companionship of women; his desire for an Ideal Woman who would feed his ego was one long romantic dream. Yet it remained a dream unfulfilled until after he was fifty years old and had seduced young Cosima from her husband.

## VII

Wagner was undeniably one of the most penetrating thinkers in the history of art. He knew this—a fact which often made him insufferable as a man. He was as surely one of the greatest musicians and one of the most capable dramatists. He also imagined himself a great writer and poet, but in this he was mistaken. His prose works are seldom read today. They contain some of the most important ideas on art hatched in the nineteenth century, but as literature they are heavy going.

"Wagner's essays are of astonishing intelligence," writes Thomas Mann, "but they are not to be compared, as literary and intellectual achievements, with Schiller's works on the philosophy of art—for instance that immortal essay on Naïve and Sentimental Poetry. They are hard to read, their style is both stiff and vague, again there is something about them that is overgrown, extraneous, dilettante. . . ."

The most important of Wagner's prose works are *Art and Revolution* (1849), *The Art Work of the Future* (1850), and *Opera and Drama* (1850-51). His most notorious piece was a tract called *Judaism in Music*, in which he tried to prove the Jews a subversive influence in music. This was partly inspired by his dislike of Mendelssohn's music and his hatred of Meyerbeer, who he imagined was thwarting the production of his operas.

The underlying theory of *Art and Revolution* and *The Art Work of the Future* is a need for an entirely new art, which shall regenerate and free humanity. The Greeks, Wagner felt, had such an art in their drama which was a synthesis of several arts—music, literature, painting, sculpture, the dance. Moreover, it was not a commercialized project; it was rather a religious festival, "the expression of the deepest and noblest consciousness of the people". Only a revolution in modern society could bring about this regenerating, unified art work which (according to him) was the salvation of the "free Greeks".

From these realms of pure theory (and more than a dash of fancy) the composer got down to something more concrete in his next piece, the lengthy tract, *Opera and Drama*. This was his first exposition of the new "music drama" idea which had long been agitating his mind. Wagner had felt for years that there was something fundamentally wrong with the aesthetics of opera. He got down to the core of it in one sentence when he said that the error of opera lay in the fact that "a means of expression (music) has been made the object ;

and that the object of expression (drama) has been made the means". In other words, composers heretofore had thought of their dramatic story only as a convenient scaffolding upon which their music might be built. What he wanted to do was to make a powerful dramatic story, clothed in the splendour of poetry, the real object of his endeavour, with the music simply one of the handmaidens which would point up and intensify that drama. To accomplish this would require a radically new approach to the various elements of opera. A new type of poetry would have to be written, a special kind of drama, and an entirely different kind of music. All the old stylized forms and practices—the set numbers, the arias, the choruses, the old divisions into scenes, etc.—would have to be thrown out of the window; instead the music would have to flow along continually with the drama in order to give it the movement of reality.

Especially pregnant for the future were Wagner's ideas for the orchestra. He felt that it should not confine itself merely to helping along the particular words that were being sung; rather it should express in the broadest way the mood behind the words. In short, the orchestra was no longer merely to accompany; it was to be the main protagonist of the drama, expounding all phases of it with symphonic freedom and fullness.

Many of the ideas which Wagner expressed in these prose pieces sound stale today because they are long since an accomplished fact. Midway through the nineteenth century, however, they were still the dreams of a visionary. They required someone who would not only create the music dramas themselves but school a new generation of singers and musicians to interpret them, educate the public to appreciate them, and even build a new kind of theatre in which to produce them. It was to this gigantic task that Richard Wagner now applied himself.

While he was busy writing about his theories for the music dramas of the future, Wagner was also casting about for a fit musical subject on which to begin. For a long time he had been attracted to the idea of Siegfried, the hero of the *Nibelungenlied* in the Norse mythology. In 1848 he had made sketches for an opera based on Siegfried's death, but he laid it aside and wrote a long prose sketch on Jesus of Nazareth. After that he went back to *Siegfried's Death* and decided to expand it, leading up to it with another opera called *Young Siegfried*. Then he realized that he would have to go still farther back and use even more of the legend. He ended up with not one music drama but four—or, as he termed it, a trilogy with a prologue. *Das Rheingold* was the prologue, and the trilogy consisted of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Die Götterdämmerung*.

This vast project underwent many changes in the composer's mind before it crystallized into the final story. As he progressed backwards with the main plot he made many changes in the details of the legend. There were various prose sketches of great length before he reached the final poetic libretto. This libretto was finished in 1852 and the composer published it—a small edition distributed among his friends. He was immensely disappointed with its reception. He could not understand that to everyone but himself his verse without music was simply an empty shell.

Undaunted, he held one of his readings. He called together a group of his friends in a hotel in Zurich and read them the entire poem on three successive evenings. As his interest in his own ideas gradually became an obsession with him these readings became standard practice. Once he actually read the whole of *Opera and Drama* to a group of friends. Twelve evenings were required. It

is a tribute to the man's personal magnetism that his audience, far from quailing before so fearful a dose of literary medicine, actually went away clamouring for more.

At this time a new and modern force was taking a hand in the shaping of Wagner's career. This was the force of publicity. *Lohengrin* had been produced in 1850 by Liszt at Weimar, and with historic success. Everywhere in Germany people were discussing both the successful operas—*Rienzi*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*—and Wagner's radical prose pieces. A serious misunderstanding arose. Many were bewildered when they could find no trace of the composer's theories in his operas already produced; it was not clear that they applied to works as yet unwritten. The war that then broke out over Wagner was by all odds the most violent in music history. Every conservative critic, every opera manager, musician, and singer with tory leanings went after him, all feeling that their comfortably accustomed order was threatened by a madman. On the other side he was defended by a few intelligent champions like Liszt, and by the general public itself. For Wagner's operas were their own best advocates. Wherever one was well produced its popularity grew in leaps and bounds.

Meanwhile the composer himself struggled on at Zurich, desperately lonely in his mental isolation, standing before the most stupendous task any musician had ever attempted. By the middle of 1853 he had as yet made no beginning on the music of *The Ring*. Much of the time he was physically ill. He had tried all sort of treatments in Switzerland, including a ghastly water cure and an even worse sulphur cure. He could not seem to find the peace of mind that might induce the dream state essential to inspiration. And then one afternoon the sick, neurotic man dropped upon a couch, exhausted after a long walk. Instead of sleeping he fell into the curious state of catalepsy that is supposed to have accompanied his finest inspiration. It seemed, he said, as if he were engulfed in a torrent of water whose rush and roar sounded like "the chord of E flat major, surging incessantly in broken chords". The triad of E flat major never changed; it persisted until he awoke in terror with the feeling that the water had rushed high above his head. And then he recognized at once what his subconscious mind had finally delivered: the orchestral Prelude to *The Rhinegold*.

A short time later he set to work, translating his vision into the incredible opening of *The Ring*—136 measures on the tonic chord of E flat major which plunge the listener to the twilit gloom at the bottom of the river Rhine.

### VIII

At first he moved with swiftness. *The Rhinegold* music was completed in about seven months, between November 1, 1853, and May 28, 1854. He worked so well that he imagined he could finish the entire project in three years. But with *The Valkyrie* began difficulties. It required the better part of two years, and he did not get to *Siegfried* until 1856. There was a long interruption in the spring of 1855 when he went to London to conduct eight concerts for the Philharmonic Society. The fee was £200 and he needed it badly, but it turned out to be the hardest money he ever earned. He loathed London. The critics excoriated his music and his conducting, so he decided they were all Jews in the pay of Meyerbeer. For some time he had been reading the philosophy of Schopenhauer; now he plunged into the *Divine Comedy* of Dante—exacerbating

treatment for a lonely, homesick man. The root of his trouble was his enforced detachment from *The Ring* and, even worse than that, his separation from Mathilde Wesendonck.

The Wesendonck story is a long one. (All the associations of this volcanic man were long and involved, and whole volumes have been written about his relations with Mathilde, Minna, Cosima, Liszt, King Ludwig II, Nietzsche—to say nothing of Bülow, Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Jessie Laussot, and a score of others.) Mathilde Wesendonck and her husband Otto, a wealthy partner of a New York silk house, had met the composer during his early days at Zurich. The Wesendoncks were soon hypnotized by his personality. Before long Wagner was a continual guest in their home, followed by the step inevitable: Wesendonck began giving him financial help of various kinds, including finally a house for him and Minna to live in, adjoining the lovely Wesendonck villa.

Mathilde was twenty-three when they met; the composer was thirty-eight. She had beauty, intelligence, and sensitivity; she yearned for an understanding of art and music, but her mind, she said, was "a blank white page". Upon this Wagner proceeded to write, in characters bordered with fire. He expounded Beethoven's music to her; he told her of his own theories and his visions; he read her all his prose works. Every evening he would play for her what he had composed in the morning. On the manuscript of *The Valkyrie* are cryptic inscriptions testifying to the composer's infatuation. He composed five songs to poems by the young lady, which he called studies for *Tristan and Isolde*.

The precise limit to which this love affair proceeded remains a mystery. Wagner's was a transfiguring passion, but mingled with Mathilde's affection for him is more than a trace of feminine shrewdness. She knew that every hour spent with Richard Wagner was a step towards immortality, but she was not prepared to sacrifice her home, her children, and the protection of her wealthy husband. For several years she pursued a course between the two currents, with that wiliness by which some women can make diplomatists seem like amateurs at their own business.

By this time Wagner had progressed to the middle of the second act of *Siegfried*, and his huge task had begun to weigh him down. He despaired of ever completing *The Ring*, or of producing it once it was finished. Meanwhile, a new idea had begun to crowd into his mind—the legend of Tristan. At last, in midsummer 1857, he made a decision that would have broken the spirits of smaller men. He stopped work altogether on *The Ring*. "I have led my young Siegfried into the lovely solitudes of the forest," he wrote to Liszt; "there I have left him under a linden tree, and, with tears from the depths of my heart, said farewell to him."

He hoped the interruption would be a short one, but twelve years passed before he met his young hero again.

Instantly he flung himself to work upon *Tristan and Isolde*. A prose sketch and a poetic libretto were each written in a few weeks; by the end of the year he had completed the music of the first act. Inspiration was going at drop-forged temperatures, and he might have set a new record of accomplishment, but as usual his luck did not hold out. In the summer of 1858 the dream of bliss with Mathilde was suddenly shattered by Minna. By this time even the townspeople of Zurich were gossiping, so Minna created an old-fashioned bourgeois scene and denounced Mathilde to her face. There was nothing for Wagner to do but get out. He left both Mathilde and Minna and went alone to Venice. In that one moment the break was made for a removal of the influence of both women



*[Courtesy of Courtlandt Palmer]*

### FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

From a rare daguerrotype made about three years before the composer's death.



[Braun Brothers

RICHARD WAGNER

from his life. At Venice he finished the second act of *Tristan*, and then he went to Lucerne, where the whole work was completed in the summer of 1859.

*Tristan and Isolde* is one of those works, like the "Eroica" Symphony of Beethoven, which exist both as supreme art creations and as forces which influence, regenerate, and fortify all the music which comes after them. This product of Wagner's unfulfilled desire inundated the minds of countless composers of his time and the decades following him, and now after three quarters of a century it haunts them still. Wagner himself never surpassed it. *Die Götterdämmerung* is grander, more powerful in the puissant sweep and the impact of its Olympian style; but *Tristan* is an unmatched concentration of beauty, and for originality it is peerless.

The story of this music drama is one of love thwarted by circumstances of honour. The knight Tristan is sent by his uncle, King Mark, to Ireland to fetch the Princess Isolde so that Mark may marry her. Act I begins with the voyage from Ireland to Cornwall, when Isolde recognizes Tristan as the man who had killed Morold, her betrothed. To avenge that crime and to avoid a loveless marriage with Mark, Isolde resolves that she and Tristan must both die. He agrees to drink with her from a cup of poison; but Brangäne, Isolde's maid, has secretly mixed a love potion instead. They drink, and instantly the unspoken passion between the two bursts into flame. In the second act Tristan and Isolde meet secretly in her garden, and during a long summer night they declare their ecstasies and their despairs. With the coming of the dawn, King Mark and his courtiers unexpectedly return. The old king's reproaches are poignant and unanswerable; Melot, one of his courtiers, wounds Tristan. The scene of the third act is Tristan's ancestral castle in Brittany, where the knight lies dying under a lime tree in the courtyard. Dreams and deliriums are mingled with his longing for Isolde. She comes to him at last, and he dies in her arms. Isolde then sings out her own heart over the body of her lover.

The libretto which Wagner devised from this story is unprecedented first of all for its lack of dramatic action. For long stretches of time no movement occurs, and there are seldom more than two persons on the stage. Most of the drama is played in the minds of the two chief characters. The conventional chorus is reduced to a mere handful of measures in the first act, sung by a group of sailors. There are no stage effects whatever. This is Wagner's ideal of a drama expounded by means of music, and it is the purest realization of that ideal which he ever attained.



orchestra, Wagner gave himself an enormous dramatic advantage; for the orchestra, with its unlimited range of tonal colour and dynamics, has an emotional power far greater than that of any voice or combination of voices. By developing the leitmotiv idea the composer had at hand still another new and potent device. It has always been a puzzle to modern theorists that the leitmotiv scheme lay around so long practically unused until Wagner took it in hand. Various composers before him had employed a recurring theme to label a certain character, or object, or state of mind; but they had done it only in a half-hearted fashion. Wagner himself had used hardly more than a dozen in *Lohengrin*, and they appear only sporadically in the course of the opera. In every one of his works after that they become the chief organizing force of the entire score. *Tristan* has some thirty predominating motives, and at least a dozen more of a secondary nature. They dominate the score from beginning to end, and provide the life germs from which the entire melodic scheme grows.

Some of the earlier Wagnerian motives are long and cumbersome, but in the mature works these themes are often reduced to a few notes—concise, swift, arresting. In an instant they telegraph to the mind of the listener a mental picture which would require whole paragraphs of words. A few in *The Ring* are actually onomatopoeic; e.g. those associated with the flowing of the Rhine, the roar of the Dragon, the sound of the forge, and most famous of all, the gallop of the horses in the "Ride of the Valkyries". Others are strongly descriptive—like Loge's flames in *The Valkyrie*, and the plodding of the Giants in *The Rhinegold*. The great majority are pure musical abstractions which, by the composer's alchemy, become a vocabulary of sound images and symbols. Those in *Tristan* are almost all of the abstract type, and for conciseness of utterance, subtlety, and emotional expressiveness Wagner never surpassed them. They are remarkable both in themselves and in the way the composer wove them into his musical pattern. They are strong as steel or plastic as clay in his hands; he can present them alone or in combination, he can change them harmonically, rhythmically, and even melodically, and they still retain in some mysterious way their power and identity.

The harmonic texture of *Tristan and Isolde* could be a separate technical study in itself. When Wagner finished *Lohengrin* the horizon of music was still bounded by the old world of diatonic harmony; with his music dramas after *Lohengrin* he was a Columbus opening up a new world of chromatic harmony. It was a world which a few other composers, notably Chopin, had touched upon but never really explored. The harmonic gulf which separates *The Rhinegold* from *Lohengrin* is wide. It is astonishing that the composer was able to make such an advance in this branch of technique during a long spell when he was not actually composing. With *The Valkyrie* he went still farther, but in *Tristan* he is the master of a harmonic style the like of which the world had never seen.

Wagner's arrival at this new style coincides with his exploitation of a new type of free counterpoint. The texture of his mature music is notable in the way it became increasingly polyphonic; there is a constant movement of various lines of melody in the orchestra, often made necessary by the combining of several leitmotifs. Bolder polyphonic procedure depended upon and engendered greater harmonic freedom and *vice versa*: the two developments complemented each other and permitted almost unlimited expansion in both directions. As he progressed Wagner used a whole new apparatus of chromatic modulations, breaking down inhibitions which had bound composers for centuries. He used all sorts of devices to modify and enrich the common chords, to avoid cadences

and expected resolutions; he used dissonance with a lavish hand. Most important of all, he *dramatized* his harmony—his chords, chordal combinations, modulations, keys even—until it became as potent in his general scheme as melody itself. The result is a veritable chemistry in music—magical transformations of harmonic colour which go on in endless series, one more startlingly rich than the last.

So much for the technical bases of Wagner's great music drama. On the aesthetic side one may only reiterate what has been the verdict of nearly a century: that *Tristan* is the sovereign creation for the lyric stage. Wagner invented two characters who will live with Romeo and Juliet; he brought them to life in a world of tone which, for emotional range, eloquence, and passion-drenched intensity, makes even poetry seem pale by comparison. From the incomparable Prelude to the closing "Liebestod", measure after measure, the composer maintains the unyielding pressure of great inspiration. The opening of the second act and the ensuing love duet is one long purple patch, a Shakespearean balcony scene prolonged with every artifice of musical skill until it becomes almost unbearable. Even finer is the third act, the reverse of the shield on which are graven not the ecstasies but the mournfulness, the shrouding despairs of love. A death scene has always been a cheap way to buy emotion, in opera as in literature; but the death of Tristan, and all the long, wonderfully prepared scene which leads up to it, is musical utterance of the highest order. It has also the elevation, the nobility, and the poignancy that mark all great tragic drama.

If there is a blemish in *Tristan* it is at least a famous one—the dreary complaint of King Mark as he interrupts the love scene in Act II. Wagner erred here. He forgot that the wronged husband or lover, if he would win sympathy, has only the recourse of silence. Otherwise he is a fit subject for comedy, as Balzac demonstrated with finality in his gallery of antlered ones. King Mark's position is not changed by the fact that the love of Tristan and Isolde remained, in Wagner's version, unconsummated.

## IX

During the five years that followed the completion of *Tristan and Isolde* the life of Richard Wagner dragged along the river bottom of existence. If ever an artist were put through an ordeal by misfortune it was he. He had on hand three completed operas and part of a fourth. All were masterpieces, but there was no hope of getting any of them performed. His love for Mathilde Wesendonck had ended in frustration; life with Minna became a nightmare. His wife was suffering from heart disease, and the opium which her physicians prescribed for relief began to affect her mind, already warped by jealousy. She and Wagner lived together sporadically until a final break in 1862, after which he never saw her again. The composer carried on several desultory romances, one with Liszt's daughter Blandine, a sister of Cosima.

In 1861 an attempt was made to produce *Tristan* in Vienna, but the project was abandoned after fifty-seven rehearsals. The press of Germany had always presented a granite front against the composer; now rumours began to circulate that his new works were not only monstrous but unsingable.

The cruellest defeat of all was the failure of *Tannhäuser* in Paris, in 1861. This was the most notorious fiasco in the history of opera, and a blemish on the cultural face of the Second Empire. The composer had gone to Paris in 1860

with the vain hope of getting *Tristan* produced there. He had an admirer at Court—Princess Metternich, the wife of the Austrian Ambassador—who in turn had access to the curiously hazy mind of Napoleon III. To please her the Emperor ordered a production of *Tannhäuser* at the Opera.

Almost instantly a powerful cabal formed itself against the foreign composer and his work. The objections centred ostensibly around the lack of a ballet in *Tannhäuser*. It was an unwritten law of the Paris Opera that every work performed there must have a ballet, either during or after the second act. Beset by the management, Wagner rewrote his overture and first act to include a bacchanal. But this would not do. The Jockey Club, a group of aristocratic young subscribers who came chiefly to see their mistresses in the ballet, habitually dined late and did not arrive in time for the first act. They protested, but Wagner would not give in. For months the wrangling went on. The management spent some £8,000 on a production that was in every way magnificent; there were 164 rehearsals, fourteen with full orchestra. The whole venture was under Wagner's supervision and might have been a triumph. Instead the première, on March 13, 1861, almost ended in a riot. The Jockey Club deliberately sabotaged the performance. Their hisses, laughter, and whistling, mingled with the shouts of protest from those in the audience who wanted to hear the opera, created an uproar that drowned out the music. The same indecent demonstration of hate and stupidity took place at the second and third performances, after which Wagner withdrew the work.

For his labour and his heartbreak the composer received £30, the royalty on three performances. To the world he gave a new masterpiece. In his "Paris version" of the Overture and Bacchanal he had grafted on to his early work a piece of his mature inspiration of *Tristan*. This Bacchanal is a red-hot coal of passion, an orgy of tonal sensualism that has no peer in music. The piece might serve as a study in the art of orchestral climax, for Wagner knew the secret of piling layer upon layer dramatic excitement, as he held in far reserve the final overpowering culmination. In the *Tannhäuser* Bacchanal he surpassed even the orgasmic pattern of the *Tristan* Prelude.

In 1862, in the midst of his worst miseries, the composer began work on *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* (*The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*), based on an idea that had been in his mind since 1845. For several years his work dragged on, with the composer too sick and distracted to give it full attention. Amnesty was finally granted him to return to Germany, after twelve years of exile. He made a trip to Russia to conduct some concerts, and promptly squandered the money he made. A rich widow promised to give him an income and pay off his debts, so he celebrated Christmas by loading his friends with expensive gifts. Later the widow withdrew her kind offer, which left the composer looking straight into a debtors' prison. When his friends tried to commiserate with him he cried, "What's the good of talking about the future, when my scores are lying locked in the cupboard? . . . I'm not made like other people. I have finer nerves—I must have beauty and brilliance and light. The world owes me what I need."

By the spring of 1864 Wagner was at the end of his rope. He was financially ruined and spiritually defeated. And then occurred the most incredible event of all in the life of this incredible man. One morning at a hotel in Stuttgart where he chanced to be staying, he received a visitor whose card bore the title: Private Secretary to the King of Bavaria. Wagner listened to a message which seemed like words spoken in a dream. Ludwig II, the nineteen-year-old King

who had just ascended the throne of Bavaria, had been searching for him. The King was mad about Wagner's music. The composer must come to Munich; his debts would be paid, his music dramas would be produced; everything that he needed for happiness and security would be given him.

It was all true. Wagner rushed to the palace at Munich, and his meeting with the King was a moment of overpowering emotions. In the complex saga of the composer's life there is no episode more strange than this. Wagner found to his amazement that he was the young man's idol, that Ludwig was steeped in his music and his prose writings. Within a few weeks and in the course of innumerable meetings they mapped out a course of action: *Tristan* was to be produced in Munich, and then *Die Meistersinger*; after that the Paris version of *Tannhäuser*, the completed *Ring*, and finally *Parsifal*. All this would require, they thought, not more than seven years. There was also to be an impressive national music school, and a theatre specially built to mount Wagner's vast creations.

That was the dream. Even though it was never realized by the two men together, the fact remains that Ludwig rescued Wagner and saved for the world three surpassing music dramas which might never have been written. He tried to perform an act of wisdom and generosity which would have occurred to few rulers in modern history, but he paid a heavy price for his idealistic effort. In his own character, as well as in Wagner's, were the flaws which ruined the plan before it had even begun.

Ludwig was a handsome young man, with a certain intellectual keenness. Had this been joined with stability it might have fitted him ideally for kingship. Instead he was emotionally unbalanced, abnormally sensitive and introspective. As he grew to manhood his frustrations made him morose and solitary. He had homosexual tendencies against which he struggled constantly. He looked upon Wagner and Wagner's music as his moral and spiritual salvation. As for the composer, he simply lacked the one ingredient necessary for a person in his unbelievably fortunate position—caution. Had he played his cards differently he might have appeased the statesmen and politicians who were watching the young King with anxious eyes, but that was not Wagner's nature.

The first fruit of the association was the première of *Tristan and Isolde*. The production, magnificently prepared by Wagner himself and conducted by Bülow, took place on June 10, 1865. It was a consummation of desires so long unfulfilled that the composer was beside himself with joy. He had not long to exult. By this time the political leaders of Bavaria were aghast at his influence over Ludwig. They began to make capital of the composer's extravagances and the drain he was causing on the state finances. Wagner had begun paying off his debts and had set himself up in a splendid house. He persuaded Ludwig to make Bülow Court pianist, which meant that Cosima was able to come to Munich and take charge of Wagner's household. Soon gossip began to circulate about the composer and his friend's young wife. Within a year after the rescue Wagner and his doings had become a national scandal, and it was freely rumoured that the King was insane. Ludwig finally broke under political pressure, and late in 1865 he wrote Wagner a pathetic letter telling him that he would have to get out of Munich.

The composer went again to Switzerland. Although he did not know it, out of the wreckage of Munich his whole life would now resolve into a period of peace and comparative security, during which all the unfinished projects of many years would slowly converge into reality. He established himself in a

lovely villa called Tribschen, on Lake Lucerne. There he spent the next few years on the composition of *Die Meistersinger*, attended by Cosima and helped financially by the King. It was one of the few happy times of his whole life.

*Die Meistersinger* was completed early in 1868, and it was first performed in June of that year, in Munich. Wagner returned to the city for the rehearsals and at the première he sat with Ludwig in the royal box. Even though the performance was a great success the press heaped abuse on both the work and the composer.

*Die Meistersinger* comes closest to *Tristan* as the most nearly perfect work that Wagner ever wrote. As dramas the two are polar extremes in the art of their creator. *Tristan* is supremely tragic, a "child of sorrow", Wagner called it; *Die Meistersinger* is a comedy—the best operatic comedy after Mozart.

The story is set in the old town of Nuremberg, in the early sixteenth century. The hero is a young minstrel-knight, Walther von Stolzing. He tries to enter the song contest of the mastersingers of the town, because Pogner, a wealthy goldsmith, has offered the hand of his daughter Eva to the winner of the contest on St. John's Day; and Walther loves Eva. He rebels against the dogmatic rules of composition that the mastersingers have set for their contest. He is opposed by Beckmesser, the town clerk, a viciously stupid pedant; but he gets sympathy and help from Hans Sachs, the shoemaker, a man of kindness and common sense. At the contest Walther triumphs over Beckmesser and the narrow-mindedness of the mastersingers themselves when he delivers his splendidly rhapsodic "Prize Song".

The allegory of *Die Meistersinger* is fairly obvious. Walther is Wagner himself, struggling against the critics, the pedants, and the conservatives of his day. Beckmesser was generally regarded as a caricature of Eduard Hanslick, the Viennese critic who was the composer's deadly enemy. So that this point might not be missed by anyone including the subject himself, Wagner once read the libretto of his opera to a group which included Hanslick.

By and large, *Die Meistersinger* is Wagner's best work as a dramatist. It is magnificently broad and sunlit, motivated by human affections and weaknesses and absurdities that have never failed to touch and delight the heart. As for the music, one must wonder at the magic by which the whole complex apparatus of the composer's art is suddenly switched around to serve a type of drama that was entirely new to him. The mood of *Die Meistersinger* is different from that of all his other operas, yet he works in it with the assurance of a master with years of the technique of comedy behind him.

The most noticeable technical difference between this work and its predecessor is the composer's return to diatonic harmony—in mood at least. Even though *Die Meistersinger* is the richest and most opulent diatonic fabric created up to that time, it nevertheless preserves a feeling of straightforwardness in its chord and key relationships, which is essential to the characters and their story. The "strange foreign" chords of *Tristan*, the bitter dissonances, the exotic chromaticism would have been utterly out of place in this tale of a sweet old sixteenth-century town and its simple people. For sheer lyric beauty *Die Meistersinger* is Wagner's masterpiece. Its melodies are fulsome, distinguished; they are spread prodigally through the great score, singly and with all the wizardry of counterpoint until there seems to be no end to the composer's powers of lyric invention.

In the matter of character delineation *Die Meistersinger* again is Wagner at his summit. Here the portraits are lifelike even down to the members of the

chorus: Walther and his manly impetuosity, the sweetly virginal Eva, care-free David, Beckmesser, the prototype of pedantic meanness and deceit, the pompous mastersingers themselves, and above all the wonderfully moving humanity of Hans Sachs. Whatever time may do to Wagner's art, whatever changes in the fashions of music may rob his work of its potency, this much will always be said: that he had the power to create in tone the images and the hearts of living people. He could bring them into existence and with piercing intensity paint the world around them until they began to own a part of reality. In *Die Meistersinger* even his enemies must give him his due, as he brings to life a piece of the vanished past in that ancient sleepy town under the flooding moonlight.

## X

After *Die Meistersinger* an inner harmony took possession of the composer's personal life. Cosima had left Bülow—left him a wreckage of nerves and ruined pride; from now on nothing that the world said could separate her from Wagner. She bore him three children, and in 1870 they were finally married. The composer left a record of his domestic happiness in the "Siegfried Idyll". This and his early "Faust" Overture are his only important works for orchestra alone. It was composed secretly for Cosima, and on the morning of her birthday she was awakened by her husband and a group of musicians playing it in the hall and upon the stairs of Tribschen. It is an exquisite symphonic fragment, woven from themes which the composer also used in *Siegfried*.

With domestic bliss came the deep satisfaction of public recognition. In spite of the defeat at Munich the world of art now sought out the composer at his retreat to pay him homage. Wagner never discouraged disciples, and among them there came a young professor of classical philology, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose adoration of the composer was fanatical. The Wagner-Nietzsche association burned brilliantly for a few years and then exploded, leaving one more mystery for the biographers to solve. Nietzsche had got too close to his idol, a dangerous proceeding for a fierce idealist who is also young.

At Tribschen the composer returned after twelve years to the uncompleted edifice of *The Ring of the Nibelung*. An immense labour still confronted him, but by 1871 he had finished *Siegfried* and started on *Die Gotterdammerung*. The next five years were given over not only to the completion of that work, but to the building of the theatre where the trilogy in its entirety would be performed. To raise money for the project Wagner Societies were formed all over Europe and in America; the composer raised part of it by giving concerts. He chose the site of the theatre himself (on a hill outside the little town of Bayreuth in Upper Franconia); he supervised every detail of its construction, and he selected and helped train the singers and instrumentalists.

Several times the whole project seemed about to fail for lack of money. Once it was saved by King Ludwig, who had remained aloof but finally came forward with a gift of £15,000. At the eleventh hour a vitally needed £1,000 came from the Exposition in Philadelphia which was celebrating the centenary of the Declaration of Independence. Wagner was commissioned to write a march, so he dashed off a potboiler called the "American Centennial March".

On August 13, 1876, the doors of the new Festspielhaus at Bayreuth opened at last, and a cycle of the complete *Ring of the Nibelung* was begun. On that

evening *The Rhinegold* was performed, followed on successive evenings by *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and the *Götterdämmerung*. The royalty of Europe, both of politics and art, assembled in the audience, and from the far corners of the world men watched the triumph of Richard Wagner.

It would be hard to magnify the enormity of his achievement. Twenty-seven years had separated the first nebulous imagining and this final overwhelming realization; a quarter of a century of suffering and frustration, of defeats that had rowelled through his heart and soul. If ever the world had an object lesson in the majesty of human perseverance it had it that evening in midsummer when Wagner first saw his trilogy unfold.

*The Ring of the Nibelung* stands alone in music. It is by far the largest single structure any composer has ever attempted. It is actually a threefold achievement—music, drama, and philosophical and moral allegory all rolled into one. An outline of the stories of these four music dramas would be too long to give here. Guide books which run to a hundred pages or more are not always complete. Suffice to say that the Ring itself is a symbol of the evil which ill-used power lets loose upon the world. In the first scene of the *Rhinegold* the foul gnome Alberich steals a golden treasure from the Rhinemaidens and forges it into a ring which will bring to whoever holds it power over the whole world—provided he first renounces love for ever. The Ring is taken from Alberich by the god Wotan, who craves world rulership; but the gnome in a fury of despair sets a curse upon the Ring and all who hold it. The working out of this curse is related in the four dramas, and it moves with the relentlessness of fate. The Ring brings ruin and death to all who possess it; it destroys the race of the gods; it causes the death of the hero Siegfried. In the closing drama Brünnhilde, wife of Siegfried, at last frees the world from the curse of the Ring. As a final act of atonement before she seeks death on the funeral pyre of her beloved, she flings the Ring back into the Rhine.

The welding of this endlessly ramifying legend into four workable dramas was first of all a task of organization. That was precisely Wagner's gift. He could never follow the common practice of all other composers—taking someone else's plot and working it into an opera. He had to execute the entire project himself. In *The Ring* he spent years assimilating and organizing his material before he even started on the music. He had to arrange the vast story so that it would fall into four separate sections; each section must be an effective dramatic unit in itself, and each must fit into the arch of the entire trilogy. He had more than thirty main characters to bring to life. He evolved almost one hundred leitmotifs which had to be woven through the four scores like threads through an enormous tapestry. How he kept the myriad details of this task in clear precise order in his brain, through a span of twenty-seven years; how he retained the grand line of his epic always in front of him as he toiled through endlessly detailed miniatures; how, as he wrote the billowing opening triads of the *Rhinegold* Prelude, he must have heard the last resolving chords of the *Götterdämmerung*—these are the mysteries and the wonders of his genius which would have to be admitted even if *The Ring* were a failure as a work of art instead of a triumph.

The weaknesses of the trilogy as a whole are obvious—and in a sense inevitable. Even though the four music dramas have an amazing homogeneity of style and colour, they are distinctly unequal in workmanship and inspiration. They progress from a somewhat loose and even crude texture in *The Rhinegold* to the absolute mastery of style, inspiration, and technique in the *Götterdämmerung*.

*The Rhinegold* is a far step beyond *Lohengrin*, but it is still a mixture of the early Wagner and the late. Disturbingly commonplace melodic ideas are mingled with some of the first examples of the composer's greater leitmotifs; a new boldness of harmonic invention appears, but there is still a reliance on old diatonic clichés, including the most overworked chord in every old opera composer's book—the diminished seventh. *The Valkyrie* is a finer work. The composer is working with a more assured hand, which is especially noticeable in the mastery of his vocal writing and the balance maintained between singers and orchestra. There are imperfections: e.g. "Siegmund's Love Song" in Act I is a lapse into Teutonic sentimentality which is hard to forgive. The pace is deliberate and there is a prevailing gloominess of mood; nevertheless the piece remains the most popular of the four music dramas. This is largely due to the third act, which contains a sequence of the composer's most brilliant murals—the "Ride of the Valkyries", "Wotan's Farewell to Brünnhilde", and the "Magic Fire" scene.

*Siegfried* has been called the scherzo of the trilogy, for its mood is prevalently cheerful. The exquisite peace of the forest pervades many of its pages. Here at last the great Wagner begins to emerge, the Wagner of *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger*. *Die Götterdämmerung* dominates the other three dramas like an overhanging cliff. It is a tremendous score—long, concentrated, with a projectile-like force which neither Wagner nor any other operatic composer ever matched. All the scenes, the characters, the emotions, and the musical apparatus of the entire trilogy are here brought to their long-drawn-out climax. It must be accounted a stroke of rare fortune that Wagner was able to take on the work of composing *Die Götterdämmerung* at the moment of his ripest maturity. Had it been either too soon in his career or too late the result might have been an anticlimax fatal to the whole project. Wagner was a master of last acts, a skill every dramatist must envy, for it is the hardest part of a drama to create. *Götterdämmerung* is his supreme last act, besides being the only one of the trilogy in which his inspiration was wholly equal to the magnitude of his main idea.

Inequality then is a major blemish in *The Ring*, and there are others. All these pieces except *The Rhinegold* are overlong. The composer became involved in lengthy recapitulations of his plot, which he felt necessary to his story but which even his musical skill could not float. They hang like dead weights upon a vessel. The work as a whole is overfreighted with story details, to say nothing of the composer's philosophical notions. The plot itself is full of inconsistencies; in places it is almost unintelligible.

Lastly, *The Ring* is too big for the theatre. No opera house has ever approximated the scenic grandeur that is inherent in the story and the music, and it cannot honestly be said that the ludicrous parodies which often result are the fault of stage directors and designers. All four music dramas are full of scenes and dramatic action which are simply beyond realization within the four walls of the conventional theatre, e.g. the dim abysmal depths of a great river, the entrance of a group of gods into a majestic Valhalla, a hilltop aflame with magic fire, the wild ride of a company of Valkyries through storm-lashed mountains, the cataclysmic overflow of the Rhine and the fall of Valhalla—to say nothing of such impossible ideas as a pair of giants, the magic transformations of a *Tarnhelm*, the ride of the hero's wife upon a horse into a funeral pyre. Too often the wonder of what the music paints is daubed out by the ineptitude of what the eye beholds. Too often the illusion created by Wagner's magnificently wrought



characters, the glowing nimbus of reality which the music gives them, is effaced in an instant by the surrounding cardboard of the theatre.

The truth must be that Wagner's vision of *The Ring of the Nibelung* has never been realized. In all likelihood it never will be, unless some genius of a new art form based on the sound film will be able to re-create the work and bring its vast collation of elements into true focus.

## XI

In *The Ring of the Nibelung* Wagner's skill in writing for the orchestra reached its apex. In the science of instrumentation, as in that of harmony, he stood head and shoulders above all other composers of his epoch. He derived his orchestral style from two main sources—Beethoven and Berlioz. From Beethoven he learned symphonic treatment of dramatic ideas, intensity, a vitalizing style of attack; from Berlioz he had his first model for modern instrumental colour. Out of these two he welded the orchestral style that is uniquely his own—a blend of heroic strength and warm, sensual richness.

The progress of the Wagnerian orchestration is a fascinating study for specialists. It began in his early works with the orchestra which most opera composers of the day were using—a fair body of strings with woodwinds and brass in pairs. With his ensuing music dramas there is a steady augmentation of forces until in *The Ring* he is using both woodwinds and brass in groups of four, with several new instruments added—the English horn, bass clarinet, double bassoon, and bass trumpet. This permitted harmonic completeness through all the choirs of the orchestra. For *The Ring* he also added a group of four special tubas, while the percussion and even the harps are augmented in proportion. To counterbalance this weighty aggregation he demanded a string choir of more than sixty players, and these he often subdivided.

The result was the most powerful body of orchestral force yet assembled in an opera house, but it was not used for force alone. It was used chiefly for variety—for an unending succession of beautiful tonal and dramatic effects. Wagner thought of the orchestra both as a large single unit and as an infinite number of small contrasting groups. To the invention of tonal effects by means of these smaller groupings he brought a boundless ingenuity. His handling of the woodwinds especially was revolutionary, and the finest after Mozart. He established the modern usage of that choir as an unsupported unit, and he used solo flute, clarinet, and bassoon with the delicacy of a miniaturist.

It is astonishing how much of the man himself and his essential character appears even in this technical side of his art. The sybarite who craved soft lights, exquisite sounds, caressing textures, all the sensuous pleasures of life, looks out at us continually from this opulent orchestration—from its silky fineness, its lush, velvet smoothness, from the golden patina which covers all trace of harshness even in the extreme sonorities.

Hardly less remarkable than the oriental richness of this orchestration is its clarity. In his time Wagner's scores were the most complex instrumental fabric yet woven; nevertheless they were the most transparent. A glance at his pages shows the formidable number of notes often sounded at one time, seeming to suggest an inevitable turgidity. Instead, by his knowledge of the instruments, their possibilities and combinations (a knowledge which he seemed to have intuitively), he gave his music the limpidity of crystal. Even in moments of

polyphonic complexity the strands of melody move among one another with perfect smoothness and freedom.

With Wagner begins a new orchestral epoch, both for opera and the symphony. It was not alone that he expanded the orchestra in size and resource beyond the standard set by Beethoven. He made it the virtuoso playing body that we know today. He made immense demands upon the players, requiring that all of them play with the skill formerly expected only of soloists. There are passages in his works which remain today the most difficult in music. But his demands are never those of ignorance or ineptitude. They spring from the most penetrating knowledge of orchestral technique that this art has yet witnessed.

## XII

The first Bayreuth performances of *The Ring* turned out, as might be expected, a financial failure. There was a deficit of about £7,000, and for six years it was impossible to open the theatre for any further performances. Wagner had built himself (with Ludwig's help) a handsome house, called Wahnfried, not far from the theatre. There he spent the remaining years of his life. He was an old man now, worn down by almost fifty years of constant struggle, troubled by a variety of diseases—erysipelas, dyspepsia, insomnia, and an ominous ailment of the heart. But his creative instincts still burned, leaving no respite for the tired mind and the weary body.

There remained the unfinished idea of *Parsifal*. Like all his other works, it had lain in his consciousness for years. On Good Friday, 1858, he had been deeply moved by the divine benison which seemed to rest upon the fields and the countryside near Zurich, and he had written the words to a scene which later became the "Good Friday Spell" in *Parsifal*. Even before that there are traces of the Parsifal idea in the abandoned *Jesus of Nazareth*, of 1848. With *The Ring* out of the way he set to work, and for five years he toiled slowly through this last great epic of his life. It was finished in the spring of 1882, and the following July the Bayreuth theatre was reopened for its première.

It was inevitable that Wagner should write *Parsifal*. All of his dramas without exception are based on love, the impulse which ruled his life and his thought. In his last work he turned, like so many sensualists grown aged, to religion—to the triumph of renunciation over desire. In so doing he produced his most controversial work. *Parsifal* has been called sacrilegious and sanctified, blasphemous and reverential, dull and divinely inspired.

The story is derived from various legends of the Holy Grail. According to Wagner's version a miraculous Grail and a sacred spear are contained in a castle, Monsalvat, in the mountains of Gothic Spain. They are guarded by a company of knights. But the king, Amfortas, has lost the spear. He had sinned, and now suffers from a hideous wound in the side which will not heal. He was tempted by Kundry, a weird creature who is the slave of the magician Klingsor. Amfortas' only hope comes from the words of a prophecy: that a guileless fool shall one day deliver him, a simpleton moved by pity and untouched by temptation. In the first act Gurnemanz, one of the older knights, encounters Parsifal, a strange, headstrong youth who is ignorant of his past life. Gurnemanz brings him to the castle, where he witnesses the solemn eucharistic ceremony of the knights. At the end he remains stolidly unmoved. In the second act Parsifal is beset by temptations plotted by Klingsor. There is a magic garden with a

group of lovely flower maidens, and Kundry herself in the role of enchantress. When her attempted seduction fails, Klingsor hurls the sacred spear at Parsifal, who seizes it and makes the sign of the Cross. In an instant the garden and flower maidens are destroyed. After years of wandering Parsifal once again finds Monsalvat. He comes on Good Friday morning as a knight clad in black armour. At the solemn ceremony Parsifal heals the wound of Amfortas by touching it with the sacred spear. Parsifal is hailed as king.

Wagner looked upon *Parsifal* as a sacred work which would be profaned if it were ever performed in an ordinary theatre. He decreed that it should be performed only at Bayreuth. At first a halo of inviolability remained around the work, but soon even the faithful began to be troubled by doubts. Moved as they were by much of it, especially the Grail scenes in which certain rituals of the Catholic Church were borrowed and subtly dramatized, they were nevertheless disturbed by the Magdalen-like figure of Kundry, and the allegory of the scene in the third act where she washes the feet of Parsifal. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these Christlike conceptions and the seduction scene in Act II was often downright shocking. Certain of Wagner's old enemies finally came out and denounced him as a showman who had been notoriously anti-religious all his life and was now making capital of the mysteries of a great faith. Nietzsche was utterly revolted and maddened. In 1888 he published *Der Fall Wagner (The Wagner Case)* in which he excoriated as a hypocrite and a degenerating force in music the man whom he had once deified as its saviour. Others declared that the music of *Parsifal* gave no evidence other than of the composer's senility.

One of the most penetrating estimates of *Parsifal* is that of Huneker. It was written early in the present century, when the general public was still puzzled and undecided about the work. Huneker damns the story of *Parsifal* from beginning to end. "Never has Wagner so laboriously built a book. It is a farrago of odds and ends, the very dustbin of his philosophies, beliefs vegetarian, anti-vivisection, and other fads. You see unfold before you a nightmare of characters and events" . . . while through it "has been sieved Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Schopenhauerism. . . . The plain fact in the case is this : *Parsifal*, despite all its wealth of legend, its misty, poetic allusiveness, its manufactured mysticisms, is simple old-fashioned opera." Huneker goes on to reduce all the oddly assorted details of the story to the lowest terms of a vaudeville show. But when he asks why the work still continues to impress and inspire multitudes of people he gives a candid answer : "The Music, always The Music".

And that in essence is the truth about *Parsifal*. Regardless of the sense or nonsense of the drama, regardless of whether the listener is impressed or repelled by this composer-cynic turned apostle, the music itself remains a fount of beauty.

It is an uneven score. After a superb Prelude the first act staggers under a load of narration which benumbs the listener. The flower maidens of Act Two are musically anaemic. Clearly this is an old man trying to remember the fires of his youth, and one may only guess what the Wagner of *Tristan* or the Paris *Tannhäuser* would have made of these seductive creatures. The work is too long and the pace often too slow ; moreover the music suffers from the fact that many of the characters it must bring to life are lacking in human interest.

Against these failings must be set music that belongs with the finest things in *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung*. In the two scenes in the Hall of the Grail pageantry and church ceremonial are blended with choral and orchestral effects to create the grande ur of a cathedral. Even if Wagner was at heart the eternal showman, he justified himself with these masterpieces of musical scene painting.

But there is more. The entire third act is a summation of his greatness as a composer. The richness of it all, the bar after bar of poignantly expressive melody that recalled to Huneke "embroidered altar cloths or Gobelins tapestry", and above all the incredible harmonies that seem to pierce to the very heart of human suffering, pity, renunciation—these are not to be found elsewhere in music. Here the very slowness of the pace and the lack of action become a virtue. For this music has a dying fall, as if the composer's life and art together were coming to their final resolution.

## XIII

Wagner was spared the controversies that arose over *Parsifal*. A few weeks after the première performances the tired old man fled with his family from the harsh German winter. They went to Italy, to Venice, where he established himself (sybarite to the last) in one of the finest palaces on the Grand Canal; there amid the splendour of silks and damasks and vistas of Renaissance marble he rested with Cosima and the children, talked for hours with old Liszt, who came for a long visit, and even dreamed of writing a symphony; and there, on February 13, 1883, he died. A moment came when the heart which had borne so much could no longer keep up with the spirit. He called suddenly that afternoon for a doctor and for Cosima. She tried to get him to a couch and to remove his jacket; his beautiful timepiece slipped to the floor. "My watch," he murmured—and spoke no more.

A few days later he was buried in the garden of Wahnfried, to the thunders of *Stegfried's* Funeral March.

Within a few years the tragedy of King Ludwig's life had also played itself out. Deposed and declared insane, he drowned himself in a lake. Nietzsche, who had also loved the composer with a blind adoration, died in a madhouse. But Cosima, who loved him most of all, outlived him almost fifty years. She died in 1930 at the age of ninety-three; and in the course of those long years she had become a veritable dragon guarding what she thought was the Wagnerian treasure—maintaining the Bayreuth theatre and presiding over the festivals, preserving the composer's ideas about his works, stoutly resisting change, fiercely suppressing criticism of her hero, always hopeful that she was perpetuating about him a legend as golden as his music.

It was a vain and useless hope. There are no longer any legends about him as a man; his works need none. Wagner's was a mighty intellect, and around it he had wrapped many robes and garments. One by one they have been stripped from him, as so many unnecessary trappings of an enormous egotism. No one classes him today as a philosopher. Thousands who enjoy his works never bother to explore the murky caves of philosophical and ethical allegory upon which he so painfully built them. He never was a poet, even though that was his fondest illusion. He did not really create a new art form; even the four parts of *The Ring* have each become simply operatic repertoire pieces. He did not even achieve his ideal of a true music drama. He improved the dramas, it is true, and he subordinated the singing, but he produced an orchestral symphony that dominated everything else.

His theories then are gone, and his philosophizing, and his queer poetry, and his dubious ethics. What remains is infinitely the greater part—"The Music, always The Music". It is a mysterious fact (pointed out by Newman) that in all

the flood of words that he wrote and spoke almost none concerns the purely musical side of his art, and his mastery of its mechanics. Stupendous as that mastery was, he seemed to take it wholly for granted. And yet—another mystery—when his music and his theories came into collision it was the music which triumphed every time. He never denied it the slightest advantage.

Even as a musician he seems to have laboured under a misconception. He considered himself solely a music dramatist; he was in fact also a symphonist. His ancestor was Beethoven. The most enduring parts of his finest works are all orchestral. Besides the various preludes there are whole sections of *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger*, the *Götterdämmerung*, and *Parsifal* in which the orchestra part is complete and the voices would hardly be missed. As a symphonist Wagner could not find inspiration in the old classic procedures, the development of a few themes, and the symmetrical balancing of one against the other. He needed the freedom of many themes. Nor could he draw them out of thin air. They entered his consciousness by way of some dramatic story, some pictorial idea, some moving emotion of the human heart.

The controversy over Wagner's music still goes on. Against the millions who worship his art there is a lesser but more articulate number whom it repels. They recoil from his sensuality and his Dionysian excess; they loathe him as a man; they deplore him as a crushing weight upon all music that came after him. No one can yet evaluate him. Only now are we beginning to understand that he, singlehanded, set the river of music to running in a new channel. He broke down the barriers of form; he freed melody and gave it a breadth and scope it had never had before; he wrought changes in the field of harmony that were the most profound in hundreds of years.

Naturally such a man would weigh upon the future. He hypnotized a whole generation of composers immediately following him, and even today others find it hard to escape the idiosyncrasies of his style. That is not Wagner's fault. The race of composers who followed him are with few exceptions his inferiors. This is especially true of the Germans. From where we stand today we may see that Wagner and Brahms stood at the end of the royal line that began with Bach, and that from the peak of the *Tristan* Prelude the slope of German music has been steadily downward.

## A NOTE ON

Verdi

1813-1901



IT IS EASY ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN THE CONTINUED POPULARITY OF VERDI'S OPERAS the world over, but an honest evaluation of his music offers difficulties presented by the work of no other composer. In his own country his melodies are known like the words of Shakespeare are known and revered throughout the English-speaking world. His art is regarded—and rightly so—as the climax of the last three centuries of Italian musical development, and the brightest sun in the entire galaxy of Italian opera. On the other hand, many musicians in other countries, especially those where the domination of German music has been strongest, have derided his work as stuff fit only for the masses; they have called him a composer of “barrel-organ tunes”, not to be mentioned in the same breath with the serious composers of Germany, Russia, or France. Those who damn Verdi often know very little of his art—his mastery of vocal writing, his fund of melody, his knowledge of stagecraft and dramatic effect, the steady progress of his craftsmanship, and the growth of his artistic stature over a period of half a century. And yet, many who do appreciate this workmanship and the finer qualities of the music could not be dragged to hear any of his operas today except *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

The year 1813 saw the birth of both men whose destiny it was to dominate opera in their age—Wagner in Germany and Verdi in Italy. The Italian was born in Le Roncole, a village in the duchy of Parma. His father kept a small inn and a grocery store. In the nearby town of Busseto was a wealthy wine and grocery dealer named Barezzi, from whom Giuseppe Verdi's father bought his goods. This kindly man took the boy Verdi into his home, treated him as a son and gave him the beginnings of an education in music. When he was eighteen years old Verdi went to Milan, tried to enter the conservatory, but was turned down. He found excellent private teaching, however, and within a few years had a fine grounding in composition. In 1836 he married Margherita Barezzi, the seventeen-year-old daughter of his benefactor. Three years later his first opera, *Oberto*, was produced at La Scala, in Milan; but with that good fortune came also a crushing tragedy. Within a space of two years (according to some accounts it was only two months) he lost his beloved wife and both their small children. The shock of the three deaths in so short a time affected him for years afterwards, leaving him embittered and at times deeply depressed.

*Oberto* was followed by a comic opera, *Un Giorno di Regno*, which failed.

Verdi was in the depths of despondency, but his next work, *Nabucco*, was an extraordinary success. In the next seven years the composer turned out no less than twelve operas, including *I Lombardi*, *Ernani*, and *Luisa Miller*. Few of them are revived today, being crude and uneven compared with Verdi's later work, but they established him as the leading operatic composer of Italy. In 1851 he produced *Rigoletto*, followed in two years by *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*—three of his most famous scores, works which made him an international figure. Thereafter Verdi's production continued at a slower pace, with a gradual ripening of his powers. The next two decades brought forth *I Vespri Siciliani* (1855), *Simon Boccanegra* (1857), *The Masked Ball* (1859), *La Forza del Destino* (1862), *Don Carlos* (1867), and finally *Aida*. The last opera was first produced at Cairo in 1871, and was commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt to celebrate the opening of the Suez Canal. It represented a climax in Verdi's career and was easily the most brilliant "grand" opera that had yet come out of Italy.

Verdi was an old man when *Aida* was finished, and he might easily have rested on his laurels. He had only one rival—Wagner—with whom he might contend for supremacy in the operatic world. In 1874 he composed his impressive Requiem, in commemoration of Alessandro Manzoni, the Italian poet; thereafter it seemed that he might end his days in the quiet of his villa near Busseto, where for years he had amused himself with farming and gardening. But in 1887, when the remarkable old man was seventy-four, he produced *Otello*; and six years later, in his eightieth year, *Falstaff*. These Shakespearean ventures, one a tragedy, the other a comedy, represent an astonishing accomplishment. At a time in his life when retrogression should have seemed almost certain, Verdi had produced his two masterpieces.

When he died in 1901 at the age of eighty-eight he had rounded out a career replete with romantic contrasts. He had come from the soil to achieve world renown in the arts; he had lived a life that began with the most anguished human sorrows and ended with the most enviable triumphs.

It used to be the practice of many musicians to deprecate Verdi's work by comparisons with Wagner's, when as a matter of fact these two men of polar personalities developed artistically in much the same way. Both of them began their careers by working with the materials of opera as they found them in their native countries; both improved and intensified those materials until they arrived, in their maturity, at the new stage of music drama. When Verdi produced *Otello* and *Falstaff* he was widely criticized for having openly copied Wagner's new style. Unquestionably he must have been influenced by his German rival's ideas and theories, which were ringing through Europe in the late nineteenth century; but Verdi's last two operas are nevertheless a perfectly logical development of his own, not Wagner's, style. The Italian was simply following his own bent along a path that was similar to Wagner's and moving in the same direction.

Verdi's first models were the triumvirate of early nineteenth-century Italian opera composers—Rossini (1792–1868), Donizetti (1797–1848) and Bellini (1801–35). All three of these men were primarily melodists who excelled in the art of vocal writing. The first two were also facile workmen. Donizetti wrote sixty-five operas and operettas in a space of twenty-five years. He actually turned out an entire operetta in only nine days, and a single act in a few hours. Works of this type were still cut from the pattern that had ruled Italian opera for centuries: they were basically designed to provide vocalists with vehicles for

splendid singing. Rossini had infused his orchestra with more brilliance and dramatic vitality, but in general the orchestra remained largely an accompanying medium, offering light and often inconsequential support for the voices, with comparatively little contrapuntal interest. In contradistinction, German opera from the time of Mozart had been exploiting the orchestra at the expense of the vocal lines. Its instrumental parts grew more weighty and complex as they gradually approached the symphonic texture of the mature Wagner. This type of music required greater powers of organization, deeper concentration, and hence more time to produce.

From beginning to end of his career Verdi remained in the Italian opera tradition, i.e. he is primarily a creator of beautiful vocal lines. The human voice dominates everything he did (just as the orchestra dominates everything Wagner did), and in his operas he created an enormous fund of melody designed to show off all the lights and facets of the vocal art. His music remains the vocalist's paradise, and an endless source of delight for all those who love the art of singing. Verdi's greatness as an artist, however, is proved in the way he refused to remain simply a singer's composer, but improved himself steadily in the manifold aspects of the operatic task. What he did with his melodies is typical. Everyone knows the banality and cheapness of many of his tunes. The composer himself has paid dearly for them; they have marred the reputation of one of music's best craftsmen. The fact is often overlooked that Verdi outgrew them as he slowly progressed. *Aida* has comparatively few of these melodic blotches, while *Otello* and *Falstaff* have none. In the orchestra he began with the conventional oom-pah-pah accompaniments of the thinnest sort, but in his maturity he was creating instrumental textures of remarkable fullness, variety, and colour. In *Falstaff* he achieved an almost perfect union of the voices and the orchestra, with the latter body supporting and illuminating the drama with remarkable musical commentary, but never overwhelming it.

Verdi's progress as a dramatist is also remarkable. He began his career at a time when almost any tragic drama, no matter how turgid or pompous, would do for an operatic libretto. The stories of the serious operas of Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Meyerbeer, and their contemporaries often impress the listener today by nothing so much as their absurdity. Donald Francis Tovey remarked that "if the famous 'Mad Scene' in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* had only been meant to be funny it would not have been vulgar at all". Verdi went through this stage in his slow evolution. He wrote plenty of music which is marred today by the homage it must pay to ludicrous dramatics, and much that misses connection with what the drama was trying to say. Many of the lovely melodies of *La Traviata*, for example, would be just as effective if they were sung to different words entirely. From these beginnings Verdi progressed until he was a master of musico-dramatics, and the creator of a whole portrait gallery of human characters. *Otello* is a music drama in the completest sense, and one of the most effective ever written; while *Falstaff* is masterly in the way it mirrors, bar after bar, the subtleties of the characters' words and thoughts.

It is unnecessary to contrast Verdi and Wagner to the detriment of either. The main exterior difference between them remains, as has been said, the pre-occupation of the Italian with the voice and the German with the orchestra. Beneath that exterior fact lie, of course, other more profound differences. Wagner was unquestionably the deeper thinker, and artist of far greater range and influence. Verdi was first of all a practical man of the theatre, who enjoyed creating popular successes as much as he relished the practice and improvement



of his craftsmanship. He had no philosophical axes to grind; no grandiose, world-shaking art projects to construct. He simply composed the finest of all Italian operas. Outside of Italy his effect on the music that came after him was limited, while in his own country his operatic descendants have all been small men by comparison. The Mascagnis and Leoncavallos have had isolated successes, but no such stream of impressive production as came from Verdi's pen over a fifty-year period. Puccini, with his fine dramatic sense and his melodic flair, was usually a good composer but never a great one.

That the best of Verdi will live is beyond question. It is true that many who lack an interest in the vocal side of music seldom turn to him. They can respect his art but never become deeply absorbed in it. But while the institution of opera endures—with all its odd conventions, its absurdities, and its curious delights—there the Italian master is sure to be found.

# Brahms

1833-97



A MERE GLANCE AT THE GERMAN MUSIC OF THE LATTER HALF OF THE NINETEENTH century is sufficient to reveal that the entire landscape was dominated by the work of two men—Richard Wagner and Johannes Brahms. In their own day, however, that fact was far from evident. It is surprising that during his lifetime Brahms made any show whatever. Of the two, Wagner was by far the more fascinating figure, an artist who dwarfed by comparison one after another of his competitors. Wagner's personality was the kind which elbows its way to the centre of the world's stage, right into the most glaring beams of the spotlight, the better to exhibit its colours. Wagner made it difficult for every other composer of his time and everyone who came after him. He made it especially difficult for Brahms.

It would be interesting (and not altogether idle) to speculate upon what modern music would be like today had there been no Wagner. In all likelihood it would be narrower, shallower, with a more limited spectrum and a shorter measure of emotion. On the other hand, if Brahms had never lived we would be lacking the magnificent bulk of his own accomplishment, but not much else. Music has moved on almost as if he had never lived.

The essential difference between the two men was the direction of their mental outlook. Wagner's imagination was projected into the future, with the unswerving purpose of a Magellan and the prescience of a biblical prophet. Everything that he did was a move forward in time—his destruction of the fences and boundaries of form, his enormous expansion of the science of harmony, his new conception of melodic freedom, the very conduct of his life as a combination of free soul and *Übermensch*.

In the midst of this rush towards new frontiers in music, Brahms sat steadfast, immovable and grave—his eyes firmly fixed upon the past. His imagination was entirely retrospective. Technically speaking, he invented nothing; he changed nothing. His preoccupation with what had gone before him and his disdain of trends towards the future were so fundamental that many of his contemporaries (like many misguided moderns) failed to recognize him as a romantic composer at all. In certain respects he was like Bach, who, in summing up the age of polyphony at its close, was left a lonely and monastic figure, his work old-fashioned in a world which had moved on towards newer standards. Brahms's music might easily have suffered the neglect that Bach's did. What saved it was the institution of the public concert, by his time well established in

Western society, and the rise of the commercial publisher—two factors which served to keep his work steadily before the public eye.

Brahms suffered at first because there are fashions in music and musicians, just as there are in dress and food, in politics and morals; and the fashion arbiters of Brahms's time were Wagner and Liszt. In his plushy retreat at Tribschen, living in blissful sin with another man's wife, and at Bayreuth, painting all four great walls of a new musical Jerusalem, Wagner had captured the admiration of Europe; and so had Liszt, the flamboyant pianist-composer holding court at Weimar, with one foot in the church sacristy and the other in some lady's boudoir. In contrast to these brilliant men lived Brahms, in his dreadful bachelor flat in Vienna, lodgings that were a monument to bourgeois stodginess; Brahms, drinking beer and eating sardines out of a tin, and writing the finest variations since the death of Bach. It is no wonder that his music was thought dour, he was so stubbornly dour a man himself. He was less influenced than any other important composer of his time by the most forceful creative idea then loose in his world—programme music. He loathed Liszt's symphonic poems. He gave Wagner's music a grudging admiration, but he wrote no opera himself. He never let himself get close enough to the stage to write so much as a piece of incidental music to any drama. He loved poetry and was an inveterate reader of the classics, but he relegated his inspiration from words strictly to his songs and choral works. The rest of his music is as devoid of literary or pictorial connotations as the symphonies of Haydn. No other composer of his time leaned so heavily upon the classic procedures as Brahms did, and nobody else could remotely rival what he accomplished with them. As Huneker said, he was the most potent symphonist and the most extensive contributor to chamber music after Beethoven, the greatest polyphonist after Bach.

What his contemporaries often failed to understand was the fact that Brahms, though a master of formal structure, was still a romantic composer. Even at its most abstract the outward style of his music is invariably romantic; it is lyric in contour; it sings. But the failure of many people to realize that a man could excel at the classic forms and still avoid fossilization fastened a stigma upon Brahms's music that clung to it for years. His was the best-loved and best-hated music of the nineteenth century. As late as 1900, Philip Hale in Boston could say, "This way out in case of Brahms," and still retain the vestments of his critical reputation. Only during the past few decades has Brahms reached the ultimate heights; he is now a box-office attraction.

## II

Johannes Brahms was born in a tenement in the waterfront section of Hamburg, on May 7, 1833. He was not far removed from peasant ancestry. In many respects his family were worse off than the peasantry, for the squalor of their surroundings did not afford even the redeeming cleanliness of the earth and the open sky. The family of five were squeezed into a few miserable rooms, and the neighbourhood itself was a disreputable district, frequented by sailors.

Brahms's father was a double-bass player, who worked his way up in the world until he became a member of the municipal orchestra. The composer's mother was seventeen years older than his father. She was forty-one at the time of her marriage—an unprepossessing little spinster with a badly crippled foot and a quarrelsome disposition. The mystery of that odd union is not

explained, but it left psychological scars upon the mind of the celebrated son. Brahms's parents quarrelled incessantly for many years, and when his mother was seventy-five she and his father separated and lived thereafter apart. The mother's affection seem to have been directed towards her son, who also adored her. On her death he composed in her memory one of his noblest works, the German Requiem.

Brahms's father wanted his son to become a professional musician like himself. When he discovered that the boy had unusual talent he had sense enough to take him to one of the best teachers in Hamburg. From the age of ten Johannes began to appear in public concerts. His precocity was so remarkable that his father thought of sending him on a concert tour of America to make money as a piano prodigy.

About this time began the series of episodes which Brahms was to remember throughout his life as the dark tower of his existence. The Brahms family were so poverty-stricken that they allowed the boy to play for dances in some of the lowest haunts of the Hamburg waterfront district. The thought of a child so young spending whole nights in beer-hall brothels, applauded by drunken sailors and even fondled by prostitutes, was so shocking to Brahms's early biographers that these facts were suppressed for many years; but modern writers have accepted them as a cause of a deep-seated psychosis which later warped the composer's relations with all women.

Life was bitter for this boy from the Hamburg slums. He began giving music lessons when he was twelve. He was fourteen before he saw the countryside, and at fifteen he began a regular routine of drudgery, playing in dance-halls and at parties in the poor neighbourhoods of the city. By this time he had begun to compose, but his first creative efforts had also to be turned to money-making. He wrote quantities of cheap dance pieces and popular arrangements of opera melodies, using the names G. W. Marks and Karl Würth. These pot-boilers were the first published works of Johannes Brahms.

The first piece of good fortune in Brahms's life was his meeting in 1853 with a young Hungarian violinist, Eduard Reményi, who persuaded him to go on a joint concert tour of neighbouring German cities. Young Brahms had never been out of the vicinity of Hamburg. He left his native city an unknown young man of twenty, without money, influence, or important friends; he was to return, eight months later, the most-talked-of young musician in Europe, loaded with the praise of the foremost composers of the time.

In the town of Celle he performed a celebrated feat. He and Reményi were scheduled to play the Beethoven Sonata in C minor (Opus 30, No. 2), but it was found that the piano in the hall was tuned a half tone too low. Reményi refused to tune his violin down, so, rather than disappoint the audience, Brahms obliged by transposing his part up a half tone. He played the entire sonata from memory in the key of C sharp minor. The difficulty of the Celle feat has aroused the wonder of musicians ever since. It has also aroused a certain suspicion—that Brahms was prepared for just such an emergency. All his life the composer had a passion for the art of transposition, and he often amused himself by playing Bach's preludes and fugues in various keys.

From Celle the two young men walked most of the way to Hanover, and there they met another Hungarian virtuoso, Joseph Joachim. This young man was a far greater artist than the flashy Reményi. He was already famous throughout Europe, and he became one of the most influential musicians of his era. The friendship which he and Brahms formed at their first meeting was a

lifelong inspiration to both. Joachim was amazed by Brahms's talent. The young Hamburger had with him a number of his first serious compositions—his Piano Scherzo, Opus 4, his first two piano sonatas, and some songs. He had also a violin sonata, a piano trio, and a string quartet, works which are now lost because the composer destroyed them as unworthy.

From Hanover they went to Weimar. In that resplendent old town, in which the shade of Goethe still shed a radiance and even the dim ghost of J. S. Bach could be discerned, there now lived Franz Liszt. Franz the Magnificent was music director to the Grand Duke. He basked serenely in all this historical glory, adding to it a theatrical glitter of his own. The meeting of Liszt and young Brahms was a minor drama of conflicting personalities. Liszt was his most magnanimous and charming self—elegant, effusive, hospitable in the grand manner. He invited Brahms to play, but the young man was too shy. Thereupon Liszt took up the manuscripts of the Scherzo in E flat minor and the C major Sonata and played them himself. He not only read them at sight but he kept up a running fire of conversation, mingling praise, criticism, and advice, just as he did on a later occasion when he first saw the Piano Concerto of young Edvard Grieg. Then he began to play his own great B minor Sonata, but before he had finished, so the story goes, young Brahms had fallen asleep in his chair. The truth of that last detail is often questioned; nevertheless it is not inconsistent with the character of Brahms as it later developed. Few artists have been more stubbornly independent, less willing to truckle, more deliberately boorish when it suited them to be perverse and difficult.

The next citadel which the young composer-pianist had to conquer was Robert and Clara Schumann. Brahms arrived at their house in Düsseldorf one day late in September 1853, met the coldly aloof Robert and was forthwith invited to play. This time he was not too shy, but after the first few measures of the C major Sonata Schumann stopped him and said, "Clara must hear this." When she came Robert went on, "Here, dear Clara, you shall hear music such as you have never heard before. Now, begin your sonata again, young man."

Before that day was ended Johannes Brahms had stepped out for the first time upon the world's stage. The Schumanns took him over completely. He was invited to stay in their home; Clara gave him advice about his playing; Robert could find no words of praise sufficient for his music. Schumann was loud in his praise in the famous article he wrote a month later for the *Neue Zeitschrift*. His prediction in that piece, that Brahms was the coming Man of Music in Germany, has often been deprecated as a lucky hit in the dark rather than a stroke of prescience. But Schumann knew what he was talking about. Between the two men there had appeared in a single flash that curious affinity which sometimes affects artists, the same bond of understanding which existed between Haydn and Mozart, Liszt and Wagner.

The early works of Brahms which unlocked for him the doors of fame are (with one exception) remarkable only because they are first pieces. The C major Sonata, Opus 1, which arrested Schumann's attention is a mixture of Beethoven and Schubert; the second, in F sharp minor, Opus 2, a rocky work, is unpopular and seldom played today; but the third, the F minor Sonata, Opus 5, is a masterpiece. If Brahms had been a twenty-one-year-old student of architecture trying to design a cathedral he would have tackled no more difficult task than the filling out of this immense structure. It is in five movements instead of the usual three or four. Before his Finale the composer inserted an Intermezzo which he terms "Rückblick" ["Backward Glance"]. This sonata has its shortcomings.

It is definitely too long, and its component parts do not always flow together with the flawless joining which marks the workmanship of the later Brahms. There are also incongruities of style. For example, the principal theme of the first movement is a bold exordium which opens the sonata with all the resounding clangour of a Chopin Polonaise, but it soon tapers off into a quiet second theme which threatens to lose all the splendidly gained momentum. The effect is like the joining of a battle cry with an idyl. More than once in the course of the piece are felt the disunion and the diffuseness of the unpractised craftsman.

On the credit side, the F minor Sonata showed for the first time the stuff that this sincere young man was made of. Its structure, if not graceful in every detail, is magnificently solid. The slow movement projects a fine emotion, full of romantic passion, but with no trace of Liszt's sentimentality or Chopin's self-pity. Throughout the work is maintained an astonishing originality. This is Brahms speaking. His voice is heard in the folklike character of many of his themes, in the prevailing lyric quality of others, in the thickness of his chords in the bass, and the curious way that arpeggios and arpeggio-derived figurations dominate his entire pianist style.

### III

When Brahms returned to Hamburg after three months with the Schumanns he was a profoundly unhappy man. For one thing he was saddled with the responsibility of genius, a weight he knew he must bear to the end of his days. He was also upset by the contrast of life with his quarrelling parents in their flat in the slums and the splendid, music-filled home of the Schumanns. His worst despair was an incurable longing. He had fallen in love with Clara Schumann.

The next spring, when Robert tried to end his life and the doors of the Endenich asylum had closed upon him for ever, Brahms rushed at once to Düsseldorf. He took a flat above the Schumanns', and for the next two years he sacrificed his career and his art for Clara's sake.

Apart from Beethoven and his Immortal Beloved, no romance in music history has left more unanswered questions than that of Brahms and Clara Schumann. Their attachment lasted for more than forty years, until Clara's death in 1896. During the first two or three years, especially during Robert's living death at Endenich, they were almost inseparable. Whether they were actually lovers, then or after Robert's death, is the great mystery of their sad romance.

That Brahms was desperately in love with Clara there is not the slightest doubt; but after the affair had begun to cool his whole personal life and conduct gave evidence, increasing as the years went on, of a cankering frustration. Clara herself specifically whitewashed their love into a beautiful friendship, in a passage in her diary addressed to her children and intended to set her cause aright after her death. She said simply that it was Brahms's sympathy and understanding which alone had borne her up during the days of her terrible sorrow, that their friendship was as perfect as it was unblemished, and that the small-souled and the envious who tried to make light of that friendship should go unheeded. It is hard not to believe Clara. She was a woman of deep devotions—to her Robert, her children, her art. Above all else she was sincere, with an unshaken belief in moral truth.

Some time during those early years with Clara, Brahms made him great

renunciation. He realized that marriage for them was impossible. The fourteen-year difference in their ages was not important; the simple economics of their lives was. She was a widow with seven children and no means of livelihood but her piano-playing. To take over her burden would have meant sacrificing his own destiny as a composer. He chose not to sacrifice that destiny, and with that decision his whole career underwent a fundamental change. What might be called the drama of his life came virtually to an end. He never again experienced any such brilliant and romantic episodes as those which crowded into the eight months of the year 1853, when Reményi, Joachim, Liszt, and the Schumanns found him and published him to the world. During that time he was propelled by circumstances and the influence of other people; now it was his own nature which would govern his life and his work. That nature was one of the most static ever to be joined to the buoyant art of music—a nature which hated change, decisions, breaks with the past. Brahms began to make for himself a life notable for its uneventful stodginess.

## IV

He began his preparations for his career in a manner typically ascetic. For several years, at Düsseldorf or elsewhere, he produced very little new music. He was giving himself time to study and to think. Disturbing weaknesses in his technical equipment had made themselves apparent to him. In 1854, at Schumann's instigation, he had tried his hand at a symphony, but gave it up after sketching three movements. Some time later he put down the first seedlings for the opening movement of his C minor Symphony, not actually completed until twenty years later. These projects were too big for him and he soon realized it, so he set himself a rigorous course of study in counterpoint, including canons and fugues of extreme difficulty.

To keep the pot boiling he took a job for several months each year as music director of the Court of Detmold. At this tiny principality he had to conduct a small orchestra and a choir, and give music lessons to the Prince of Lippe's sister. The Court life was old-fashioned and stiflingly dull, but with little effort he could earn enough to keep himself going for a whole year.

Two of the works which stem from the Detmold period are the Serenades for Orchestra, in D major (Opus 11) and A major (Opus 16). The D major Serenade in its original form was scored for only nine instruments; then it was expanded, and still later revised a second time before its final appearance in 1860 as a six-movement piece for a sizable body of strings, woodwinds, and brass. In this and the succeeding serenade the composer was wading cautiously out towards the symphonic waters which he feared were too deep for him. The two pieces gave him the technical exercise that he was seeking, but for the listener they are not rich in musical vitamins. They are the least played of all Brahms's orchestral works.

The Serenades are important indirectly, because they offer an important clue to the workings of the composer's mind. To the end of his career Brahms never undertook a task without first preparing himself thoroughly, and he never published a work without giving it the benefit of long contemplation and the most exhausting criticism. Whenever he approached a form which had models of particular greatness in the past—the symphony, the concerto, the quartet—his caution became acute. Rather than attempt a headlong attack, he would

side up to it, preparing the way first with excursions into adjoining territory. He hated to risk comparison with the achievements of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, or Schumann until he felt sure of his ground. At the end of his life he had contributed works of the first magnitude to every important musical form except opera. The quality of these works would seem to make his early precautions sound fussy and almost ridiculous, until it is realized that, with his slowly acquired mastery, his unshakable standards of taste, his need for time in harnessing his mental energies, this composer was one of the most profoundly self-knowing artists in history.

All through these early years Brahms was anxious to produce some work on a large scale which would live up to Schumann's estimate of his powers. Great ideas were swirling through his mind, like the nebulae which struggled for birth in the mind of Goethe and which finally emerged as *Faust*. The composer had worked over the abandoned symphony, making it into a sonata for two pianos and then the real medium for the work suddenly became evident to him—a piano concerto. He used the first two movements of the symphony and added a new finale. The result was his Piano Concerto in D minor, Opus 15, completed in 1858 when he was only twenty-five years old.

Tremendous mental effort had gone into this work. Brahms called upon a musician named Grimm to help him with the orchestration, and he sent his manuscript a number of times to Joachim for advice and criticism. If the birth pangs were agonizing the actual delivery was even worse. On January 22, 1859, in Hanover, Brahms played the concerto for the first time in public, under Joachim's direction. It was received by the audience with disdain. Five days later, when he played it at the old Gewandhaus in Leipzig, a place where any young composer would have given his soul for a triumph, it scored another notorious failure. At the end there was a reverberating silence that must have chilled the blood of the young composer-pianist; a handful of people tried to applaud, but they were drowned out in a wave of hissing.

The D minor Concerto was neglected for many years. Most virtuoso pianists in the late nineteenth century considered it dour and unrewarding. It is in fact a sombre piece, and strangely grave coming from so young a man. The bitterness of his youth, the tragedy of Robert Schumann, his warped romance with Clara had found their way into his music. So, too, had much of Schumann's art. The older man's rhapsodic style, his individualistic piano figuration crop up again and again; but the imitation is by no means a blemish. The general style is Brahms's own. It is solid, melodious in an unpretentious way, technically difficult but never showy. The piano is not spotlighted; instead it carries on a serious dialogue with the orchestra. The slow movement proves that Brahms's study of Bach had borne fruit. It contains no sugary melodies in the manner of Liszt or Mendelssohn, instead a dignified and melancholy polyphony that would have been understood by the old North German organists who were Bach's ancestors.

Today the D minor Concerto no longer needs any champions. It is clearly one of those works of commanding importance which Brahms was destined to produce in the instrumental forms. It has taken its place beside the best examples by Mozart and Beethoven, and the great B flat Concerto which Brahms himself wrote many years later when he was in his prime.



## V

At the time of the failure of his piano concerto, Brahms's personal life was still in an unsettled state. He had hardly got over the worst of his frustrated love affair with Clara when he began courting a girl named Agatha von Siebold. She was the daughter of a science professor, and she offered the rarely combined attributes of beauty, intelligence, and an understanding of music. Just when everyone was expecting the announcement of an engagement of a pair so ideally suited Brahms proceeded to jilt her—with not too gentle firmness.

At this time he was also having troubles with his family. His parents' home in Hamburg was a place of ugliness, with his mother and father quarrelling incessantly, and his brother (who became known in Hamburg as "the wrong Brahms") trading off of Johannes' generosity and fame. The young composer could not live in the same house with them, but had to take rooms in another part of the city. Hamburg itself seemed stale. Brahms tried to interest himself in the local orchestra, which was third-rate, and he assumed the directorship of a ladies' choir, for which he wrote a number of his early choral works. He was in the unfortunate position of a young man who had outgrown his family, his friends, and the city of his youth—all in a few short years. And yet, in spite of all this personal disharmony, he began enjoying a new-found happiness—the deep satisfaction of having struck his stride in his art.

For several years, leading up to his great year, 1862, new and splendid works had been in the course of construction. The gears of inspiration and technique had suddenly meshed. Besides the D minor Concerto he finished the B flat Sextet for Strings, Opus 18. This was only his second essay in chamber music (his second published one, at any rate), but it remains one of his loveliest creations in this field of music. Its outward charm lies in its flower bank of richly melodic and rhythmic ideas; but its real significance is found underneath, in the trellis of form upon which the composer built his ideas. This underlying structure is proof that Brahms had mastered, before he was thirty years old, the most difficult and abstruse phase of the music art. Formal design and the organization of material are, in all branches of art—music, literature, painting, sculpture, architecture—the aspect least obvious, the most imperfectly understood, and generally the last to be mastered by the artist himself. Brahms's strongest instinctive talent was his understanding of form. It was the thing he was able to grasp first, and to the end of his life his creative thinking was ruled by his concepts of what basic design should be.

The B flat String Sextet was the beginning of a sudden rush of works which startled even the most ardent Brahmsians like Clara Schumann and Joachim. In 1861 and 1862 came the immense F minor Piano Quintet, the first two piano quartets, five books of songs, and the Handel Variations for Piano. The F minor Piano Quintet is one of the masterworks of chamber literature. It is the opposite in style and conception from the B flat String Sextet. Instead of the sun and the warmth and the lyric buoyancy of the earlier work, the quintet is more like the D minor Piano Concerto—sultry, sombre, full of violent passions. Of all Brahms's works it was one of the last to be widely appreciated. Like the D minor Concerto, it used to give credence to the view that his music was generally dour and prolix, a collection of nuts so hard as to be hardly worth the cracking. Today, when the beauty of Brahms's style is as firmly established as that of Schubert, no one finds anything whatever unmusical in the storms of

passion in this quintet, and certainly nothing but beauty in the tenderness of its quieter moods.

As for the Handel Variations, their worth has never been denied from the moment of their first hearing. Brahms wrote them in a manner unusual for him. They seemed to spring from his pen in a rush of inspired writing like that of Schubert, Mozart, or Handel himself. One day late in 1861, Clara Schumann came to visit Brahms in Hamburg and he played them to her for the first time. She was almost stunned by what she heard. Within a month she had mastered them herself (in spite of their technical difficulties) and she introduced them to the public at one of her Hamburg recitals. Nothing that Brahms wrote for the piano has been more highly praised. Even Wagner, who generally regarded his rival's music as so much bad-tasting medicine, had only encomiums for the Handel Variations when the composer played them for him a few years later in Vienna. They showed, Wagner said, what could still be done with the old forms by someone who really knew how to manipulate them.

The original Handel theme is a fine old tune, eight bars long, perfectly symmetrical and plainly harmonized. From this simple beginning Brahms built an enormous structure of twenty-five variations, with a roaring fugue as a climax on the end. From the variety and luxuriance of the ideas it is hard to realize that these are so-called "strict" variations, i.e. the composer maintains both the basic phrase form of the theme and its general harmonic scheme in every one of his variations except the finale. Moreover, even though the work is made up of twenty-seven separate sections, these pieces are moulded together and flow one into the other with such logic that the whole becomes one magnificent and unified design.

With the appearance of the Handel Variations there was little doubt in the public mind either of the technical ability of Brahms or the direction in which he was heading. At that time the composers of Germany were cleaved into two belligerent factions, and a noisy war was going on among them and their partisans. On the one hand were the followers of Wagner and Liszt, who rallied chiefly around the latter at Weimar and who were the romantic leftists of the day; on the other were the followers of the dead Schumann, who clung to a milder romanticism which was in reality a kind of neoclassicism. Brahms, having been named Messiah by Schumann, was clearly the leader of the latter group. In 1860 he even went so far as to publish, with three other musicians, a manifesto condemning the Liszt faction and their claims to a mortgage on "the music of the future." The attack recoiled on his own head, and thereafter Brahms kept his mouth shut. He never again entered a public controversy, even though in private he excoriated programme music, especially Liszt's invention of the symphonic poem. He came to the realization that not only musicians but the public in general were fascinated by the explorations of Wagner and Liszt, and that his own ideals and procedures were tame by comparison. But he did not care. He stuck to the old variation and sonata forms, to chamber music which was dying on its feet; he went right on with the time-tested methods of thematic development, and with the old uses of polyphony, and he infused them all with new life from the breath of his vigorous young lungs.

## VI

It was in 1863, the year of his thirtieth birthday, that Brahms's personal life fell finally into the groove it was to occupy for the rest of his days. For a long

time he had wanted to go to Vienna. To a North German the Austrian capital, with its reputation for carefree, civilized living, was like a second Paris. Its glorious musical background was a tapestry through which the lives and works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert were woven like glowing threads. Late in 1862, Brahms went there for the first time and got his first taste of the city, its music, and its effervescent life. Later he returned and made it his permanent home. He loved Vienna, and it seemed that from the first the city liked him. When he gave his first concerts there was a fine assembly of influential musicians who were curious to see what Schumann's famous protégé had accomplished.

At this time Brahms was still as much a pianist as a composer. From all contemporary accounts his playing was brilliant but uneven. Although he was a very short man he was powerfully built, with heavy shoulders and strong arms. At the piano his pent-up emotions and his strength often carried him away; he was described as a bear hitting at the keyboard with great paws. Nevertheless, he could also play with the delicacy and tenderness of a woman. As he grew older his playing became more eccentric and careless. For that reason he was himself partly to blame for the mixed receptions which his music received at early public performances. His own playing can often account for works like the D minor Concerto being received with acclaim from the audience at one performance and with a deluge of ice water at the next.

One of the first friends Brahms made in Vienna was the famous critic, Eduard Hanslick, who later became a fanatical propagandist for his music. The name Hanslick has survived even into our time and some of his reputation still clings to his name. In spite of the work he did trumpeting the greatness of Brahms, he was actually a malignant influence upon the music of the later nineteenth century. He was a reactionary, and not a very intelligent one at that. In his scalding diatribes against all programme music, and against the works of Wagner in particular, he reduced music criticism to the level of religious bigotry. Hanslick was partly responsible for the two supreme musicians of their time, Wagner and Brahms, being pitted against each other constantly as enemies. Their first meeting in Vienna was their last; thereafter a gulf widened between them and their artistic careers. Hanslick did his best to widen it. He wrote as if a listener could not possibly love the works of both men, that he must perforce accept the one and damn the other—a piece of stupidity that required almost half a century to dispel.

Several years passed before Brahms finally got himself established in Vienna. He accepted a post as conductor of a choral society, the Singakademie, but after a few seasons he came to the conclusion that he was a failure at the job. His love of Bach led him to attempt performances of the Passions, motets, and certain of the cantatas, but he had neither the skill nor the inspiring qualities as a leader to grapple with those tremendous bodies. He relinquished his post, and for a while he drifted about uncertainly.

Early in 1865 word came that his mother was dying. He rushed back to Hamburg but she died before he reached her bedside. He suffered agonies of grief. There existed between this shrewish old woman and her son a bond of affection that was one of the chief ennobling influences of his life. For the shock and sorrow of his loss there could be but one assuagement; he must complete the great project which would be his mother's monument. Years before, after the death of Schumann, he had pondered these same bitter thoughts—of death and its sting, of the grave and its victory. Now, in full possession of

his artistic manhood, he could finish the task. He produced what he called "A German Requiem", for chorus, orchestra, and two soloists, the largest single work that he ever composed. Six of its seven parts were finished by the summer of 1866. Part V was added later.

Brahms's Requiem has no direct connection with the Requiem Mass of the Roman Catholic Church. The composer coupled the word "German" to the title to indicate a fundamental difference in style, if not of ultimate purpose. His text is not the Latin of the Roman Mass at all, but is a German translation of certain verses which the composer himself selected from the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. He arranged them, says Lawrence Gilman, "to present in succession the ascending ideas of sorrow consoled, doubt overcome, death vanquished".

Since the words are the inspirational basis of the work, it is the vocal side of the Requiem which predominates. Brahms, the composer of great lieder, emerges here in full flower; the piece is in reality a series of superb, extended songs. The orchestra part is comparatively subdued, providing chiefly a rich underlying texture of polyphony. Brahms's peculiar lyric style saturates the work, the same style upon which he built practically all his songs. The melodies are broad, with strong, simple outlines, long-flowing, often reminiscent of German folk song. Thus Brahms was following the dictates of his inner romantic nature in the creation of this work. It is not only a German Requiem, it is also a romantic one.

There are moments in the Requiem of great dramatic power, especially the magnificent Funeral March, "Behold, All Flesh is as the Grass". Here the ultra-conservative Brahms indulges in as theatrical a device as could be found in the instrumental book—a long and tremendously effective pedal point in the tympani. Otherwise he seldom departs from the sombre mood of his subject, its tenderness and poignancy. The work as a whole remains one of Brahms's finest scores, consistently inspired and integrated by its exalted text.

The composer's bad luck with first performances dogged him again with his Requiem. The first three parts were given late in 1867 in Vienna, and the audience hissed—not so much the music as a performance that was ludicrously bad. The tympanist lost his place and ruined the seventy-two-bar pedal point on D. The composer bided his time, however, and on Good Friday of the following year a magnificent performance of the whole work (except Part V) was given in the Bremen Cathedral. Many of Brahms's closest friends were there to witness the triumph he knew would come; Clara Schumann arrived at the last minute and he walked with her down the long nave. The performance was an immense success and had to be repeated a few weeks later.

From that moment there was no longer any doubt about Brahms. Not since Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* had such a work appeared in German music. Here at last was a man who could proclaim superb musical utterance, in the grand manner and yet with classic rectitude. News of the triumph of the Requiem awakened a public interest in the composer as never before. Publishers became eager for his works, and there was a growing demand for his appearance as pianist or conductor.

## VII

And now there emerged in outlines clear and unmistakable the figure of the great Brahms. He was thirty-five years old, in the prime of his life and his art.

The fires under the forge were blazing, the ore was waiting. Slowly, but in steady procession, the great works began to come forth—the Haydn Variations, the concertos, the “Tragic” Overture, the four symphonies, the mature chamber works and songs, the last pieces for the piano.

The creation of this prodigious store of beauty required almost thirty years and the unswerving dedication of the artist’s entire life to the task. Very soon after he settled in Vienna Brahms fell into a routine of living from which he hardly varied, year after year. The summer was generally given over to composition, the winter to public appearances as pianist or conductor, at which his own works were featured. He invariably spent the summer months in the country, always choosing some lovely spot where he could work undisturbed, while indulging his passion for nature and his habit of walking. One of his favourite summer haunts as he grew older was Ischl, a watering place on the Salzkammergut, made incomparably beautiful by lakes, mountain streams, and snow-capped peaks. He made numerous visits to Switzerland, and in 1878 he spent the spring in Italy, the first of many pilgrimages.

Invariably the central event of every summer was Brahms’s visit to Baden, where Clara Schumann maintained her home. To support her family Clara had to make concert tours all over Europe. During the winter she often did not see her children for months at a time. When the summer came they were reunited in a comfortable home near Baden. Brahms went there religiously, year after year. He gave music lessons to the children, and he played for Clara the new works which he was preparing for the coming winter season.

It was a matter of prime importance in Brahms’s career that about this time he became financially independent. He was in fact one of the first non-operatic composers to gain considerable wealth from his music alone. Once he became established, publishers all over Europe were hot for his works. They paid him large sums for publication rights and when he died he left an estate worth about £20,000. This meant that all through his most fruitful creative years he was practically free to do as he wished. And what he wished was the essentially selfish life of a bachelor.

It seems hard to escape the conclusion that Brahms’s character was dominated by selfishness. A measure of this was necessary to the practice of his art, but the unpleasant fact is clear nevertheless. The life that he chose was precisely the one he wanted, and in it there was no place for a wife or children, and only for a few friends who accepted him on his own terms. It is true that at times he was generous, giving away large sums to persons in need, and often imposing a strict secrecy; but about his own affairs he was as congenitally stingy as a peasant. He bought only the cheapest clothes, wore the same suit for years, and did not care that he looked slovenly. He ate only in cheap restaurants, and he always travelled third class. To avoid paying duty on his favourite cigars he asked his friends to smuggle them in for him, and once he was fined seventy gulden for hiding Turkish tobacco in a stocking when he crossed the frontier. The composer’s apartment in Vienna was a museum of bad taste which would have sent an aesthete like Chopin into convulsions. No hint of decorative beauty could be found in its plain walls, chromo pictures, Victorian upholstery, and uncomfortable chairs. There was no bath, and the living-room had to be reached through the bedroom. The place was generally littered with music and books.

A wife—almost any wife—would have lifted him out of the worst of this stodginess, but it is plain that he preferred his solitary and essentially sterile

personal existence. Certain of his biographers have made much of the psychological barriers which stood between him and marriage. The experiences of his childhood in the brothels of Hamburg had left dreadful scars upon his mind; it seems fairly plain that for ever afterwards sex relationship with a decent woman was something he could not bring himself to attempt. Instead he consorted with the prostitutes of Vienna. This barrier might have been overcome had he permitted himself to be carried away by any one of his several romantic passions—that with Clara Schumann, for example, or Agatha von Siebold, or Elizabeth von Herzogenberg. Instead, Brahms's passions were always held firmly in the leash of reason. He liked coming and going as he pleased; he liked his pleasant summers in the country, his trips to Switzerland and Italy. He got the keenest pleasure out of travelling all over Europe, playing and conducting his own works. For him this was all luxury of the soul, and no woman he ever met was worth trading for it.

The price that Brahms paid for this denial of marriage and parenthood became more evident as he approached old age. Gradually he assumed all sorts of crotchety habits. He had a tongue like an adder and he used it as cruelly against his friends as he did against some unfortunate stranger who made the mistake of praising his music to his face. Clara Schumann's children recalled that he often spoke to her with such deliberate rudeness that he brought tears to her eyes. He quarrelled worst with some of his best friends—Hans von Bülow, with whom he broke off completely for two years after a bitter feud, and Joachim, whom he wounded deeply by taking the side of the violinist's wife in a divorce action. His was the case of a person of extreme sensitiveness, modesty, and even kindness, who put on, with pathological perversity, the outward armour of rudeness. His sarcasm and his ill temper became a legend which has long outlived the finer attributes of his nature.

#### VIII

Just as his personal life was dominated by selfishness, so was Brahms's art ruled by caution. No composer, great or small, destroyed more than he did. He began this ruthless habit in his boyhood, and even through the years of his finest productivity reams of music went into his waste-basket. As a result the general level of quality in his work is exceptionally high, surpassed only by that of Bach. He published almost nothing that could be described as mediocre. Many of his earlier works have their weak spots, but they are usually redeemed by a general excellence of the whole. Never did he produce one of those "magnificent failures" which are common with highly strung composers like Beethoven, Berlioz, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, or Mussorgsky. He had none of the pioneer spirit that lets inspiration run away with itself into a "Fantastic" Symphony or a Ninth Symphony.

Brahms was the prime example of the northern genius whose talent is kept firmly on the track of common sense. He was also the northern type of romantic, whose passions were restrained by a coldly logical reasoning. Thus it is that his music, even at its richest and most vital, is actually unsensuous, as it is almost always serious. Few composers made more copious use of folk melodies; they are in fact one of the strongest evidences of his peasant roots. Yet he always used them prudently. His popular Hungarian Dances are about as far as he ever let himself go in the way of reckless abandon, but compared

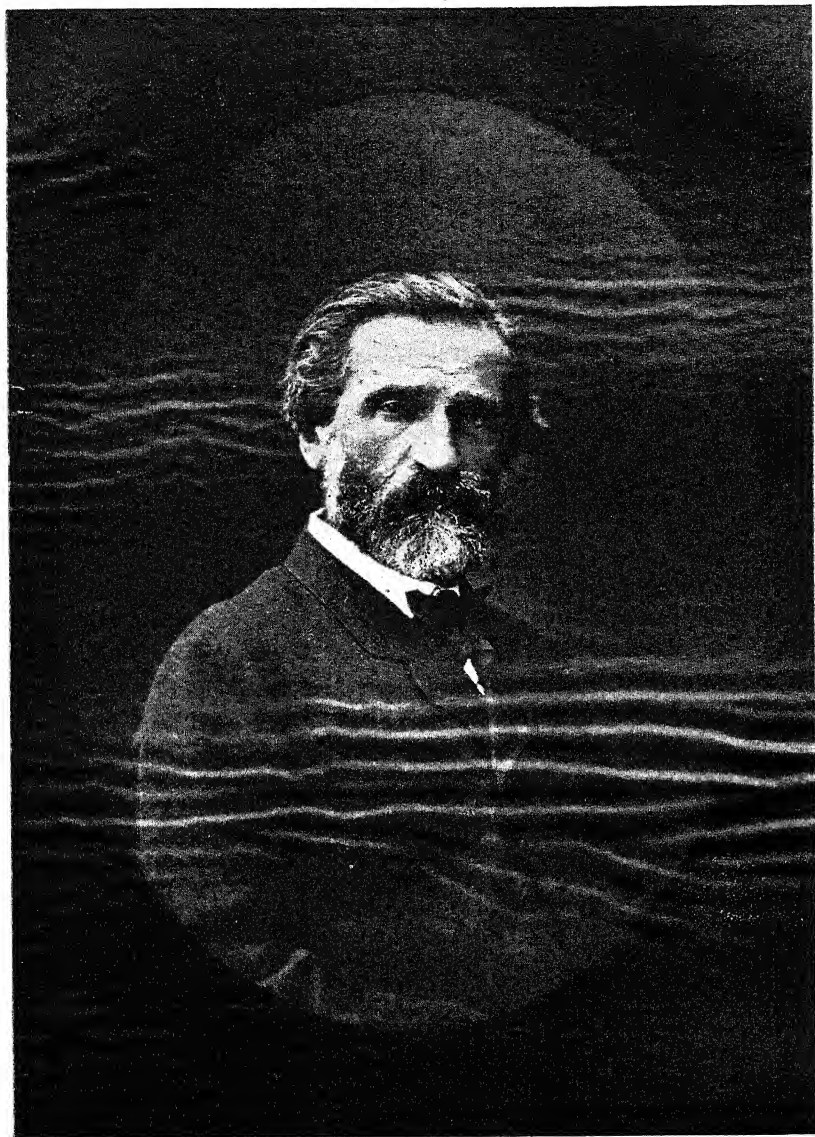
with Liszt's treatment of similar ideas in the Hungarian Rhapsodies they are tame.

In the matter of orchestration Brahms was so conservative that he used to be classed as a bungler. Berlioz, Wagner, and Liszt were doing for the orchestra what Chopin did for the piano—composing music which purposely played upon the sheer gorgeousness of sound which modern instruments single and in combination could produce. These composers raised the once-simple practice of orchestration to an art in itself. Partly through caution and partly through stubbornness Brahms refused to be persuaded into using the discoveries of these men. This was one reason why he was so slow to approach larger orchestral composition. He waited until he had developed a style of instrumentation which was his own, and which was perfectly suited to his particular musical ideas.

There is no use denying that, comparatively speaking, it is the "grey" colours which predominate in Brahms's orchestration. They are subdued rather than brilliant, opaque rather than transparent. There is seldom a hint either of sensuousness or violent contrast; there are no purple patches. But the notion that Brahms's orchestration is "muddy" is a fiction perpetuated by several generations of orchestral conductors who were themselves insensitive to any modern orchestral coloration which differed from that of Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, and Strauss. In such hands it is not surprising that the Brahms symphonies for years sounded smudged and dirty. A few modern conductors, however, have been at pains to work hard over his orchestration, and they have proven how beautiful it can be. It is bold and manly without being raucous; it is full of delicate, even exquisite tints. Most important of all, it says precisely what the music implies, no more, no less. No idea in Brahms's music is overblown by the instruments out of all proportion to its importance (as so many of Tchaikovsky's are); and there is never any toying with sheer effect to give a musical idea a subtlety it does not own (which was one of Berlioz' failings).

The same is true of Brahms's piano music. If it is played like Chopin's it may remind the listener of the description of Carlyle's prose style—"coal arriving next door". Chopin set a standard that was followed by composers for years. He spread his chords out through the various registers of the instrument to give them the most perfect transparency. It is almost impossible to make his music sound other than clear. Brahms's trade mark at the piano is the crowded thickness of his chords, especially in the bass. To avoid opaqueness the performer must use the utmost care in pedalling, and he must develop a touch of unique sensitivity. He must play Brahms's music as he plays no other.

In the field of harmony Brahms's caution is again marked, and again his reputation as a craftsman suffered for many years because of misconceptions. He was living in the age of Wagner, the most transcendent master of harmony in the history of music, yet he wrote as if Wagner did not exist. The richness of a score like *Tristan and Isolde* is possible because of its ceaseless harmonic movement that runs and flows and spreads through every possibly key, every chord, and every variant of a chord with the freedom of quicksilver. This unfettered chromaticism was the most potent of all Wagner's revolutionary discoveries. It burst through the restraints of the old diatonic system like flood waters bursting through an antiquated dam; it was the chief propelling force of modern music. Brahms lived for more than thirty years after the first performance of *Tristan and Isolde*, but during that time he hardly moved from his old diatonic position.



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JOHANN BRAHMS

In fact, as the years went on and Wagner's chromaticism opened the way for still newer harmonic discoveries by Strauss, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Schonberg, the face of Brahms's music seemed to become more markedly diatonic than ever. Again a close study of his procedures reveals their justification. Brahms was a cautious harmonist, judged from Wagnerian standards, but he was, nevertheless, a very fine one. Curiously enough, his music is far less old-fashionedly diatonic than it sounds. He actually used a wealth of keys; he devised all sorts of subtle ways to vary outworn diatonic modulations; he got remarkable effects by boldly contrasting major and minor modes, and by the uses of the old modal harmonies; he even liked astringent dissonances. The reason why we are not more conscious of the beauty of Brahms's harmonies is that he underplayed rather than overplayed their importance in his general scheme. Here again he was diametrically opposed to Wagner. Wagner, always the dramatist, squeezed every drop out of his harmonic effects. When he invented some new modulation of particular loveliness he was always sure to bring it into high relief, to work up to it with all the skill at his command so that it would fall upon the ear with an effect that would be breath-taking. This Brahms could never bring himself to do. His ultimate aim was always the purity and beauty of his general design, never of an immediate effect. His music is studded with beautiful modulations and harmonic highlights, but often they go by so fast that the listener discovers them only after repeated hearings.

## IX

In 1873, Brahms was forty years old, and by that time the thought that had so long baffled his admirers had become a burning question: Why had he produced no symphony? Everyone knew that he had the brawn for the biggest task in music—that is, everyone but the composer himself. That year he produced not a symphony but his last preparatory study for one—the incomparable *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*.

One cannot but admire him at this juncture—first for his intellectual honesty and the self-discipline which he applied in staying his hand from the larger form, and second for the courage which it took to produce instead the smaller. The Haydn Variations were written at a time when the fashion for programme music was at its height, when picturesque titles, musical portraiture, and tonal delineations of Shakespeare and Dante, Goethe and Byron were the rage. Nevertheless, Brahms wrote his variations—a form as outmoded as a peruke. What he produced was the finest work of its kind ever written for orchestra, a work so rich in architectural splendour and melodic grace that even his worst enemies had little to say but praise. The piece is about as far removed from the average cut-and-dried variations as could be imagined. It is finer even than his *Handel Variations*, for it is more compactly built, the proliferation of its ideas from the central thematic stem is more startlingly original, and the finale with its ground-bass construction (foreshadowing the last movement of the *Fourth Symphony*) is much superior to the bombastic fugue of the former work.

The Haydn Variations only served to set the Brahmsians to clamouring louder than ever for a symphony, but they had three more years to wait. In September 1876, when the composer was in his forty-fourth year, the work that had been growing in his mind ever since the days of his youth with Schumann came at last to completion. At Karlsruhe, on November 4, 1876, the *C minor Symphony* was played for the first time—surely one of the most dramatic

moments in the composer's whole life, considering the length of time he kept the world waiting and what he had to offer when the time finally came. Since the deaths of Beethoven and Schubert half a century before there had been no symphony of such majesty as this one. The greatest of all classic forms had shrunk in those intervening years rather than grown. Nothing that Schumann or Mendelssohn had done could stand comparison with Beethoven's four best or the C major of Schubert; the symphonies of Berlioz and Liszt were tonal picture galleries rather than symphonies. But the C minor of Brahms left no room for doubt that the classic symphony was still alive at the roots.

It is plain that Brahms was making one of the biggest efforts of his whole creative life. He was consciously striving for the grand style, for panoramic design, and for the lofty emotion which motivates epic poetry and tragic drama. This is a tall order in any art and for any artist, but that Brahms achieved it in this work is beyond question. The superb introduction to the first movement is like the lifting of a curtain upon some cosmic drama; the entire movement is full of dramatic stress and tension, the racing energy which is remindful of Beethoven in his great first movements. From the technical side this opening movement is an absolute masterpiece of structural design—the sonata form expanded with perfect logic and proportion to a work of huge dimensions.

The slow movement is Brahms, the romantic, speaking. It is like some lovely, heart-searching song from which the words are absent. Its flowing lyricism is enriched at the end by the most saccharine of all instrumental devices—a violin obbligato; but Brahms uses it with no trace of oversweetness. The third movement has often been criticised as a weakness, and because it is not the bounding scherzo that convention demands. Actually it serves as a needed respite, during which the emotional tension of the two preceding movements is purposely eased.

The last movement must rank with the Titans of the art of music. Here, as in the first movement, the composer let himself go. Neither Beethoven nor Wagner, the archdramatists of music, could have improved upon the devices (at bottom purely theatrical) which this supposedly stodgy classicist uses with stunning effect. For example, the grave introduction which broods like a lowering of storm clouds over a landscape, until the sky is suddenly pierced by a lightning flash, clearing the air for the great horn theme. And again, the chorale in the brass which is first announced softly, and then is held in reserve all through the long movement, finally to be emblazoned by the full orchestra at the climactic end. Few works in music are rounded off with such magnificent and satisfying completeness.

Brahms's First Symphony was recognized instantly as a work of very great importance, but it was not immediately loved by the public. Its austerities and its complexities mitigated against that. Only in the last quarter of a century has it become a public favourite, with the drawing power of Beethoven's Fifth. During the composer's lifetime it was far overshadowed in popularity by his Second Symphony which he produced, with startling suddenness, the very next year after the First.

Except for its slow movement the D major Symphony is everything that the C minor is not—sunny, vivacious, a blend of idyllic lyricism and high spirits. The work is indicative of the change which life in Vienna, in fact the whole warm southern scene, had caused in the life of this coldly reticent northerner. It had thawed him out. Ten years before no one would have thought him capable of writing such things as his waltzes for piano, or the exquisite "Liebeslieder"

Waltzes for women's voices—or for that matter the D major Symphony. In this last work there is but one lapse into seriousness, the Adagio. It is hard to realize today that this profoundly beautiful movement was once widely despised, that it was supposed to contain everything repellent in Brahms—a grey bitterness, an incoherence, and a drabness born of frustration, a wilful disregard of melodic beauty and orchestral clarity. Times have changed, indeed, and the passage of time has invariably worked to the advantage of Brahms's greater works.

The D major Symphony also lacks a scherzo, but its Allegretto is a movement of charming grace and technical ingenuity. The composer takes a mere handful of notes and makes them serve, through various clever manipulations of accent, rhythm, and tempo, for an entire movement. This, of course, is the oldest leaf in the classicists' book—achieving unity and variety through the use of a limited number of basic ideas. It is a principle which was the cornerstone of Brahms's whole musical edifice. Every music student knows that in many of his symphonic movements it is possible to trace the relationship of all the melodic strands and to discover that chief themes, subsidiary themes, accompaniment material, sometimes even the most inconspicuous inner voices, are all derived from a few basic germs of melody. No note is wasted, and none is brought in unnecessarily. It is the constant and masterful use of this principle which gives Brahms's music its solidity and its wearing power. It lasts through endless hearings because, as Schumann said of Bach's music, it is made "for eternity".

In the matter of rhythmic variety Brahms surpassed every other composer of his time. Schumann had opened the way with new ideas of rhythm, cross rhythms, and syncopation, but his young eagle soon left him far behind. With Brahms rhythmic changes and complexities occur so often as to become almost a mannerism. He was especially skilful at making different rhythms sound against each other, giving the effect of a smooth current suddenly turning into a choppy sea. The purpose was more than a satisfaction of the composer's unusual rhythmic sense; his aim was to add flexibility, variety, and a lift in interest to his general scheme. It was one of the innumerable devices which he used to keep the attention of the listener riveted to what is going on in his music.

X

On the first day of the year 1879, at Leipzig, Brahms had another treat in store for the world. It was a new concerto, a form which he had not touched since the completion of the D minor Piano Concerto just twenty years before. The new work was for the violin, and it was first performed by Joachim, with the orchestra under the direction of the composer. Brahms was lucky to have his piece introduced by this virtuoso, for it requires precisely what the Hungarian possessed—a vast technique controlled by a superior intellect. For years there was a standing joke about this work: Bülow had called it a concerto not for but *against* the violin. Performers were dismayed by its intricate double-stopping, its wild leaps from low notes into the upper registers, veritable traps for intonation, and its endless problems of fingering. Appalling too was its size. Symphonic in length and texture, it required a giant to play it adequately, and to dominate the opulent orchestral part. No greater concerto has ever been

written for the violin. Today it is one of the two concertos (Beethoven's is the other) which are part of the repertoire of every violinist of concert stature.

As in Beethoven's concerto, the prevailing mood is one of serenity. There are few hints throughout its length of the gloom-ridden young northerner who wrote the D minor Piano Concerto; instead he is blithe as a song-bird, and in the last movement he is positively jocund. The lyrical character of this work calls attention to a quality of the composer's music too often overlooked—its singing style. Brahms's music always sings. It is this quality more than any other which proves that at heart he was a true romantic, even when he was applying most rigidly the technique of classicism. What often beguiles the listener from the realization of this fact is the immense spread of his melodies. When he is writing for orchestra, especially, his themes not only take full advantage of instrumental freedom by extending far beyond an octave, but they soar on and on, bar after bar, seeming never to end. Brahms was never short of breath. He was such a superb workman that he could put his musical phrases together without the sign of a joint, and only rarely in his mature works are the big division points of his structure anything but flawlessly joined. He was the past master of transitions.

During the summer of 1880, Brahms was at his favourite spot in Upper Austria, the lovely spa at Ischl, and he was engaged in a most unusual task—the writing of two overtures. Even though in mood these two works might suggest the twin masks of Greek drama, neither one has any direct connection with the stage. The "Academic Festival" Overture was written as a tribute to the University of Breslau, which had conferred an honorary degree of Doctor of Philosophy upon the composer the year before. It is based on four student songs—a rather odd memento from the most serious of German musicians to the faculty of a university. If the learned gentlemen were inclined to look their gift horse in the mouth they might have felt better upon remembering that a few years before when the University of Cambridge had offered Brahms a similar honour he had turned it down, because he would not go to the trouble of making the trip to England to receive it.

The "Academic Festival" Overture is not one of Brahms's masterpieces, although it is a lusty, well-made, and very popular piece. Its companion, the "Tragic" Overture, is pure gold. Because its title suggested that it might have something to do with the stage there ensued a fox hunt among annotators and critics to trace down a possible source of inspiration. Hanslick thought it must have come from *Hamlet*; others were sure it was another delineation of *Faust*. The composer as usual maintained a dignified silence. Philip Hale's remarks are nearest the truth: "The 'Tragic' Overture is among the greatest works by Brahms; by its structure, and by its depth of feeling. There is no hysterical outburst; no shrieking in despair; no peevish or sullen woe; no obtruding suggestion of personal suffering. The German commentators have cudgelled their brains to find a hero in the music: *Hamlet*, *Faust*, this one, that one. They have laboured in vain. The soul of Tragedy speaks in the music." It should be added that this work belongs with the best examples of its form—with the "Coriolanus" and "Egmont" overtures of Beethoven, and the "Manfred" Overture of Schumann.

The next major work on Brahms's agenda was his Second Piano Concerto, in B flat major. This piece was the fruit of the composer's first two journeys to Italy. In the spring of 1878 he travelled south with two of his Vienna cronies: Dr. Billroth, a noted surgeon and accomplished music amateur; and Karl

Goldmark, the composer of "The Queen of Sheba" and "Sakuntala". Brahms had the time of his life. He had never seen the changing of spring into summer in surroundings so entrancing; his whole being responded to the prodigies of beauty spread before him by the vernal earth. Some time later he made sketches for his B flat Concerto, but then put them aside and left them untouched for three years. In 1881 he went again to Italy on a more extensive tour, and again the miracle of the southern spring set his mind working in the same inspirational grooves. He returned to Vienna, took up his task, and in two months the work was completed.

The first person to learn about the existence of this new giant was the composer's dear friend, Elizabeth von Herzogenberg. This lady was one of the half-dozen or so whom he might easily have married. She had been his pupil, and after her marriage to another man she corresponded with Brahms for years. Their letters are a standard source of information about the composer and his works. The announcement of the B flat Concerto was made in a letter written July 7, 1881. It happens to be a much-quoted sample of the composer's peculiar type of elephantine humour. "I don't mind telling you," he said, "that I have written a tiny, tiny pianoforte concerto with a tiny, tiny wisp of a scherzo. It is in B flat, and I have reason to fear I have worked this udder, which has always yielded good milk before, too often and too vigorously." The piece referred to in these delicate terms is the largest thing of its kind in music—four enormous movements, a veritable symphony built around the piano. Furthermore, its heroic proportions are matched by a puissant style and such an amplitude of melodic splendour that the work is likely to remain the king of concertos for many years to come.

How much the beauty of the Italian spring had melted the heart of this man from the north is apparent in every bar. Brahms seldom wrote with such felicity of mood. In all his music there is no finer melodic flight than the lovely meditating *romanza* for solo 'cello in the *Andante*. The piano part is glorious throughout, but the performer must pay in advance for his triumph. He is put through a staggering test of endurance and skill, to say nothing of the musician-ship required of him to convey the composer's aims. The orchestral part, too, is full of difficulties for the conductor, and for the first horn and first 'cello, so that an adequate performance demands the collaboration of several artists of the first rank.

All through these years of his finest productivity in the major forms Brahms was also busy turning out many works of smaller dimensions. Hardly a year went by without at least one group of songs, and at less frequent intervals would appear a chamber work. These latter are scarcely less significant than his symphonies and concertos. As a matter of fact it would have been nothing less than a freak of nature if Brahms hadn't produced great chamber music, because he was so prodigally endowed with the three basic requirements for writing of this type—a lyric style, a command of polyphony, and a mastery of abstract form. Nevertheless he seems to have encountered immense difficulties, especially in the earlier years when he had to learn to trim down his burly, large-scale style to these comparatively delicate media.

String quartets gave him his worst trouble. He said himself that before he published his first (Opus 51, No. 1, in C minor) he had written more than twenty, and he had also written two trios, two sextets, three piano quartets, a piano quintet and a 'cello sonata. Some of these pieces he kept on his work-table for years, pondering over them, tearing them apart, and putting them together

again. His very first published chamber work, the Trio (Opus 8), for Piano, Violin, and 'Cello, was written in 1854 when he was twenty-one. Thirty-seven years later, when he was nearing sixty, he took the trouble to make a completely revised version.

For the listener, Brahms's twenty-four chamber works offer chiefly a difficulty of choice. Nearly every one has surpassing merit. In the aggregate they represent an enormous accomplishment, which from the historical viewpoint alone could hardly be exaggerated. Chamber music of Beethoven's lofty standard would have perished in the later nineteenth century had it not been for these works of Brahms.

As for the songs, they are the best evidence of the romantic spirit which lay at the heart of all Brahms's inspiration. There was hardly a time all through his creative life when this least "classic" of forms did not engage him. The sum of his work in this field is large—almost two hundred songs for voice and piano, and dozens of arrangements of German folk songs. As a writer of *lieder* Brahms stands with Schubert, Schumann, and Hugo Wolf. He carved out a style that was uniquely his own, and he did it as usual by subjecting his ideas to scrupulous self-criticism. Even the simplest of Brahms's songs, those which expose most clearly his affection for the German folk-song style, are distinguished by an unmistakable craftsmanship. He was never obvious in his procedures; there was never an idea, musical or poetic, that did not engage his best effort and his sharpest technical skill.

As a pure melodist he was not the equal of Schubert, whose themes have a spontaneous beauty that is baffling. Brahms's melodies are more artful, they have a way of moving in directions least expected, and generally they have that enormous span which is one of the hallmarks of this composer's style. That Brahms was himself a pianist with a special affection for the instrument is evident in practically every song. The accompaniments are rich in melodic and decorative ideas; sometimes they are so powerfully conceived that they steal the interest from the voice itself. It is with Schumann that Brahms has the closest affinity as a song-writer, although he lacked the wild exuberance that at times seized the older man, and the subtlety, the cunning almost, with which Schumann could reflect in tone ideas in the text. Brahms was not always a scrupulous observer of words; it is often said that some of his songs would sound just as well with different words entirely.

In the main there were two wellsprings which fed most of Brahms's vocal inspiration. The first was German folk song, whose broad simplicity of style and whose spirit influenced his entire art. The second was his own romantic nature—the passionate, moody, deeply sentimental strain which burned always in the heart of this sad-faced northerner, but which as a man he hid from the world. A mere listing of the names of his many songs indicates his predilections for the whole catalogue of romantic ideas and affections, from the beauty of simple flowers to the wild ecstasies of love, from the dreams and yearnings of youth to the frustrated longings of age.

## XI

It is fruitless to try to evaluate the relative merits of Brahms's four symphonies. Each one has certain qualities unmatched by the others. Every listener has a right to his own choice. The real point of importance concerning them is the general level of inspiration which the composer maintained without

a single break through no less than sixteen separate movements. The particular glory of the Third Symphony, in F major (finished in 1883, just after Brahms's fiftieth birthday), is its superb fusion of the two hemispheres of the composer's inspiration—the romantic and the classic. In mood he returns to the tragic austerities of the C minor Symphony. The serious note is seldom absent, from the first declaiming chords of the opening movement to the smouldering embers of the last, and there are wild bursts of passion throughout. The composer's singing style was never more in evidence, his melodies are ravishing, and in the first movement especially he achieves a variety of harmonic coloration that is sheer magic—for example, at the very outset the bold sweep of the main theme through F major, F minor, and D flat major, like the flinging of bright green and red and gold upon a canvas; and the gorgeous transmutation of the second theme from A major to a dark C sharp minor at the beginning of the development section.

Again, this symphony is lacking a scherzo. The third movement is almost a song without words, and it is so impassioned that one is apt to wonder what the cautious Brahms could have been thinking of to put so lyrical and so melancholy a declaration of love into the austere frame of a symphony. The final movement calls attention to this composer's peculiar mastery of the last word. Every one of his closing symphonic movements is crownlike in the way it rounds off everything that has gone before. That of the Third Symphony has the added distinction of being one of the composer's consummate pieces of musical design. It was a bold procedure, at the time this work was written, to end a symphony quietly, instead of with the expected triumphant declamation, but in this case the composer's logic is unassailable. Great winds blow through this closing movement, there are terrible buffetings and the shocks of battle; but the end is peace.

Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life does greatly please.

The Fourth Symphony, in E minor, is Brahms's *King Lear*. Not that it relates any such tale of shattering horror, but because the manifold powers of the artist himself had here reached their climax, and in the particular sphere of his overshadowing greatness; and because thereafter he never attempted anything of such dimensions, intensity, or emotional range. The E minor Symphony lacks the theatrical note of the C minor—the lordly introduction, the ringing, rallying finale. This time the composer had no need in his design for purely dramatic devices. The first movement has no prologue; it simply begins. But before long the forces of conflict are surging and straining, and the climax at the end of the movement is violent. Over this whole first section there is a saturnine cast, and the sombreness of mood pervades the entire work with the exception of the scherzo.

The Andante is the richest slow movement in all Brahms. Condensed within the space of a few minutes in time is an unexampled weight of melodic beauty. This is no simple lyric flight. It is densely woven, heavy with emotion, decked in some of the rarest harmonic and orchestral hues that this austere northern master ever permitted himself. The third movement refutes the charge that Brahms could not write a genuine scherzo. This one has not the torrential energy of the great examples of Beethoven, but it certainly has gusto and vigour. It is the work of an ageing man, yet it leaps and bounds like a young warrior trying out his flashing new arms in the sunlight.

For the last movement of the E minor Symphony Brahms held in reserve



an idea which had been germinating in his mind for years. The form he used was one never before attempted in a symphony—the archaic chaconne. The basic theme is eight measures long, and it consists of eight great chords proclaimed at once by the wind choir fortissimo. The composer then proceeds to build thirty sections, each one eight measures long, and each a variant of the original eight—that is, of its melodic line, its bass line, and its harmonic structure. Only at the thirty-first section does he break the mould and extend into a coda which winds up the entire work. The all-over design is also a rough kind of sonata form. The key of E minor prevails throughout, except for a few of the central variations, which are in E major.

Now this is obviously a set of self-imposed rules which seem not only stultifying but severe to the point of self-flagellation. The chaconne, however, happens to be one of the theme-and-variations species, the form in which Johannes Brahms was the excelling master in his era. Years before as a young man he had expressed his belief that Bach's violin Chaconne was one of the greatest works in all music, one which both fascinated and awed him. (He once made a piano arrangement of it for the left hand alone.) Now at the zenith of his own powers he was showing what he could do with a similar technical problem. One of the secrets of the tremendous power of Brahms's movement is the total absence of the beads-strung-together impression which is so typical of all variations and which mitigates against emotional and dramatic force. It has instead the rise and fall of action, the emotional contrasts, the sweeping movement of one episode into another with all the impelling logic of a lofty drama. It is grandiose and compelling, and it gives no hint whatever of the ironclad technical matrix which is governing every inch of its progress.

## XII

With the completion of the E minor Symphony in 1885 the twilight began to close in around Brahms's life and his art. He was not yet an old man, only in his middle fifties, but he suddenly began to take on the attributes of old age. He produced only one more large-scale work, the splendid Double Concerto for Violin and 'Cello in 1887; thereafter it seemed that some inner warning signalled the necessity for slackening his pace. Gradually his works became smaller and more intimate, but as yet there was no sign of a decline. In fact to these years belong some of his most mature chamber works—the F major 'Cello Sonata, the violin sonatas in A major and D minor, the C minor Piano Trio and the masterly G major Viola Quintet—and in 1889 came a group of songs which include such treasures as "Immer leiser" and "Wie Melodien".

With old age the composer became definitely an eccentric. He went around the streets of Vienna a corpulent, squat little man in grotesquely dishevelled clothes—a low-comedy hat, wrinkled suit, and high-water trousers. Often he wore neither socks nor a tie, and his cheap flannel shirt was covered by the famous beard, now grown white and patriarchal. The moustache was fiery red on one side and grey on the other. His thin, high-pitched voice became cracked like an old bell. A weariness began to appear in the brilliant blue eyes, and at times an anguished melancholy. He often spoke of his loneliness and the price he had paid in giving up a wife and children.

The composer's mental suffering began to appear in his music. It is noticeable in his last four chamber works, those featuring the clarinet. The composer had been a warm admirer of Richard Mühlfeld, the first clarinetist in Bülow's

orchestra at Meiningen, and for him Brahms wrote a trio, a quintet and two sonatas. The Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Opus 115, is a great work, but the other three pieces are rather severe. There is not only a greyness of mood evoked by the reedy voice of the chief instrument but a comparative thinning out of inspiration.

Early in 1892, Elizabeth von Herzogenberg died, and the shock to the composer was profound. Thoughts of the ir retrievable past and of what he had missed in life began to torture him. He spent many hours at the piano, the instrument of his lost youth. From these spells of brooding improvisation came four groups of solo pieces, the last and some of the finest music he ever wrote for the piano. They are as usual abstractions, even though they bear the somewhat romantic names of *intermezzo*, *capriccio*, *romanza*, *ballade*, and *rhapsodie*. During the years when Chopin's music reigned supreme in concert halls these small works of Brahms lay neglected, like so many pieces of old-fashioned jewellery in a collection of flashing brilliants. They are mood pieces, and though a few are gay and energetic most of them are minor both in mode and feeling. Some are as lyrically inspired as his finest songs; others are grave, bitter-sweet, hauntingly sorrowful. As always, the composer's piano style is singularly his own—devoid of display, solidly built, with more attention paid to polyphonic richness than to tonal colouring.

It is curious to note that after the huge F minor Sonata of his youth Brahms wrote no large-scale work for the piano alone. He made unexampled use of the instrument in his chamber works and in the two giant concertos, but alone the piano seemed to him more a companion for his intimate reflections.

Within a span of two months, in 1894, Brahms lost three of his closest friends—Dr. Billroth, Bülow, and Philipp Spitta, the celebrated musicologist and biographer of Bach. The deaths of these men were a threefold blow, and in the spring of 1896, when Clara Schumann suffered an apoplectic stroke, it seemed that he had prepared himself for a last and terrible defeat. He wrote his "Vier ernste Gesänge" ["Four Serious Songs"], which have rightly been called a Hymn to Death. The composer selected his texts from the Bible, his lifelong study and solace. The first three are from Ecclesiastes, beginning with the words: "One thing befalleth the beasts and the sons of men; the beast must die; the man dieth also, yea, both must die." The last is taken from Corinthians: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." For the bitter words of the preacher, Brahms found an echo in his own soul. He knew again the terror and the agony which smoulder in the Germanic mind at the thought of death. He wrote in the mood of his vanished youth, with the brooding pessimism and resignation that had coloured his first sternly serious works. With these songs his art had deepened incomparably, to produce the finest works of their kind in the entire range of German lieder.

A week after he finished the "Serious Songs" Clara Schumann died. The composer travelled to Bonn for her burial, and he arrived a broken and exhausted man. With Clara had passed not only the woman who had come nearest to his heart, but the last link in his life with the great past—with Robert Schumann, who had cried out for him in the wilderness, with Mendelssohn, and Liszt, and Wagner. During that final summer of 1896 his music was to end too. Eleven chorale preludes for organ (published posthumously) were his last compositions, and the closing notes of these are a fantasy on the chorale "O World, I Must Depart from Thee.

On April 3, 1897, Brahms died of the same disease which had killed his father, cancer of the liver. He had no close relatives left in the world, and very few friends who were dear to him. He bequeathed his entire fortune and his library to the Friends of Music Society of Vienna, whose artistic director he had been many years before.

## XIII

Like Bach, Brahms had long outlived the age to which his work seemed to belong. From his earliest years he had watched the music of Wagner move steadily away from him, and as time went on the distance rapidly increased. When he died practically all the younger composers were listening to the siren voice from Bayreuth; nobody of consequence followed Brahms. If his work was made to seem drab beside the flaming colours of *Tristan and Isolde*, more violent contrasts were to come. At the very time that he was composing his "Four Serious Songs", Debussy was working upon *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Between these two works lies a chasm. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast in style, technical procedure, and in the ultimate aims of the two composers. Debussy's impressionism, moreover, was only the first of even more revolutionary movements in music which came to fruition in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

The triumphant fact about Brahms's music is that during these very years, when it was besieged on every side by the novel and the revolutionary, it did not shrink in stature. It grew. More of his music is played today than ever before. When it appears on programmes with the best of the impressionists, the nationalists, and the ultra-modernists, it is seldom the Brahms score which yields first place in interest. He stands as solid as an oak—a living proof of the strength of an aggressive classicism.

In one sense at least Bülow was right in placing Brahms with the other two Bs. Like Bach and Beethoven, Brahms knew how to leaven his classicism with the richness of his humanity. In music, as in art, the danger of classicism is the drying-out process. Once the artist becomes preoccupied with pure design to the exclusion of his own personal emotions, once he surrenders to the rule-makers and the academicians and forgets that art cannot sever itself completely from nature, then he and his product are headed for decay. Beethoven rescued the eighteenth-century classic forms—the symphony, the sonata, and the string quartet—from just such a death. When he left them they were still the recognizable designs of before, but they were enormously expanded to accommodate the scope of his own imagination and personality. To regard Bach as simply an archformalist and technician in the abstract is to miss at least half of his greatness. A large portion of his music is an expression of his own religious fervour—a personal belief so strongly infused into his work that if the Christian epic were to perish in every other medium of human expression it could still be revived in all its grandeur from Bach's Masses, Passions, and cantatas.

So it was with Brahms. He used the devices of classicism not as an end in themselves but to express the dictates of his own romantic heart. These were the two sides of his nature, and in his supreme works they were not at war but in perfect harmony.

# Mussorgsky

1839-81



LIKE A BLACK THUNDERCLOUD RUSSIA HAD LOOMED FOR CENTURIES UPON THE horizon of eastern Europe. Down to the time of Peter the Great little was known of this country outside its own boundaries. A vast, amorphous object on the map, it appeared to generations of western Europeans as an impenetrable murk of barbarism, ignorance, and mystery. Cut off from the rest of the continent both by distance and the iron rule of its despots, Russia was denied an interchange of thought or of peoples with the countries of the West. It was a prison house from which few men and fewer ideas ever came out, only an occasional torture shriek from its oppressed populace, to horrify and haunt Western ears.

When Peter the Great finally got his "window on the West" (i.e. an outlet on the Baltic Sea at the expense of Sweden) Europe began to get momentary glimpses of the inside of this dark, forbidding country. It beheld with awe the Russian cold and the Russian distances, and with repugnance the Russian serfdom. Spread over a limitless area was a jungle of races, languages, and religions—a Slavic mixture shot through with Tartar streams that had poured in from the East up to the days of Genghis Khan.

At the time of the American Revolution ninety-five per cent of the Russians were serfs, and this enormous population was chained to the land. Laws of brutal stringency forbade a serf from leaving the property of his master. This was to prevent migrations in a country where agriculture was of prime importance and farm labour was at a premium. On land owned by the state a serf had a few privileges; on the property of the rich landowners he was no more than an animal. His master could work him, tax him, torture him, kill him—and the state had nothing to say. To the Western mind the docility of generations of Russian peasants is a mystery, even admitting that revolts were common and that they were put down with wolfish ferocity.

An equal mystery is the mind of generations of Russian aristocrats, especially the czars themselves, who could not perceive that the backwardness of their country was due to this deep-sea weight of poverty and ignorance. When rulers like Peter the Great tried to import Western industries it was seldom with the idea of improving the lot of the peasants. Serfdom was simply transferred from the soil to the factories and the mines; the peasants became the slaves of a few rich industrialists. One such wealthy family owned more than eighty thousand workers in their plants. As for importations of foreign culture, like that which

Catherine II encouraged from France, only the thinnest crust of the aristocracy was reached and influenced.

It is impossible to name any single cause for the universal darkness that enveloped this great country down to the beginning of the nineteenth century, but one fact does stand out in high relief. Russia lacked great leaders—high-principled, inspired men whom more fortunate Western nations were able to produce in times of stress and need. That was the supreme tragedy of Russia. Until the Revolution of 1917 there was no Washington in Russian history, nor a Simon Bolivar, nor a Garibaldi—men who combined strength with virtue. Too often Russia's rulers who, by broad standards, might be classed as great were also vile.

One such ruler was Ivan the Terrible. He might have performed (like his contemporary, Elizabeth of England) valuable services for his country in the way of unification and expansion, for he was a man of intellect, immensely energetic and industrious. But he was also ferociously cruel, and his private life was an abomination. In 1570 he performed, in the destruction of Great Novgorod, the most appalling act of sadism in modern history. Rumours had come to him of an impending revolution in this city, the second wealthiest in his domains. Without even waiting to investigate he set upon it. For five weeks the slaughter and the pillaging went on. As many as 1500 men, women and children died in a single day, and 60,000 people in all were killed. For a hundred miles around the city every house, church, monastery, and barn was burned or wrecked; all goods and cattle were carried away or destroyed.

A few years before he died Ivan struck his eldest son in a fit of temper and killed him.

Peter the Great was another sadist with a murderous temper. The services which he performed for Russia are darkened by the record of his personal barbarity—his enormous appetites for vice and cruelty, his orgiastic pleasures, the delight he took in inflicting tortures and mass executions. This giant of a man (he was six feet eight inches tall) was a prodigious worker who tried mightily to raise the industrial standards of his country to the level of the rest of Europe. On his travels through Germany, Holland, and England he not only investigated the factories and the shipyards but he actually worked in them. For a time he toiled as a common sailor and as a carpenter. At Amsterdam he tried his hand at engraving. When he returned to Russia he attempted to graft Western ideas and methods on to his recalcitrant subjects. He imported thousands of foreign craftsmen to teach modern manufacturing methods. He reorganized the governmental machinery and he built a navy. He even attacked his people's medieval customs and clothes, forbidding the wearing of long beards and ordering women to remove the veils from their faces.

Much of Peter's wholesale campaign to modernize Russia was praiseworthy and farsighted; unfortunately, it was clamped on the country by force, and under threat of torture, maiming, and death. Much of it collapsed after his death. Peter never fully understood the forces which create prosperity. He could not imagine that the welfare of his country depended upon the welfare of the poorest serf. He was utterly indifferent to human life. When he built St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) he transported an army of workmen to the river Neva, there to create on the empty marshes an entire city of stone buildings. One hundred thousand of these men died in the process, killed by starvation, disease, and overwork.

It is one of the oddities of human character that this violent man was deeply

religious and that he loved his wife devotedly. She was his successor, Catherine I. At one time Peter suspected her of a liaison with a young gentleman of her bedchamber, one William Mons. Peter found that the affair was harmless ; but he beheaded Mons, and "the severed head, preserved in spirits, was placed in the apartments of the Empress".

Hardly less contradictory was the character of Catherine II, also dignified in history by the appellation "the Great". She was the daughter of a minor German prince and was married to the Russian archduke, afterwards Peter III, a disgusting boor of a man who hated her. When he was murdered by one of Catherine's lovers, and in all probability with her full knowledge, she took over the throne herself. Catherine as a ruler is an anomaly. She had one of the most vigorous minds in Europe and was as able in statecraft as any man. She was widely read, professed an admiration for the Encyclopedists, and carried on a famous correspondence with Voltaire. There is no doubt that she held the affection of her subjects throughout her long reign, but she remained in practice a despot. Though she talked of liberalism and reform she did nothing to alleviate the sufferings of the serfs. After the peasant uprising of 1775 the leader, Pugachev, was captured and brought to Moscow in an iron cage before execution ; thousands of others were killed, and the Siberian dungeons were choked with a new population of prisoners.

The private life of Catherine II was the most lurid scandal of her time. It consisted of nymphomania on a regal scale. Her lovers were chiefly recruited from her governmental ministers and agents, and from the young officers of her army. She is supposed to have spent £10,000,000 on these favourites, taking the last one when she was sixty-seven.

In the long and dismaying history of Russia's sufferings the brief period of the Great Reforms, beginning in 1855, is like a sudden rift in endless storm-clouds. For several decades the rest of Europe had been forging ahead with the tremendous impulses of the industrial revolution ; Russia alone remained in stagnation. By the end of the Crimean War she was wallowing in defeat and despair. Czar Alexander II, a cautious, phlegmatic man, sensed the temper of his people. He was motivated by both a deep-seated fear of revolution and a conviction, shared by the educated classes, that something must be done. He moved slowly, but within a decade there was accomplished the greatest work of reform that Russia had yet known. The corner-stone of the whole movement was the legislation of 1861 which began the emancipation of the serfs.

It is true that many of these economic and political reforms died a-borning, and that many of the hopes of thinking men were blasted when Alexander was killed by a bomb in 1881. Nevertheless, during those brief years the intellectuals, the liberals, the humanists, the men of art, raised their heads at last. This period of the Great Reforms marks Russia's emergence as an important contributor to world art. In hardly more than a generation she produced one of the great literatures of modern times, the work of men like Turgenev, Dostoevski, and Tolstoy. She also produced Russian art music in a form which was to sweep the whole Western world by the originality, the vitality, and the brilliance of its style. It was no accident, but rather a fact of prime significance, that Dostoevski and Tolstoy, Russia's supreme novelists, and Mussorgsky, her greatest composer, all drew their power from the depths of their sympathy for the common man.

## II

The rise of Russian art music is a story as incredible as a piece of romantic fiction. To all intents and purposes there was no important Russian music before the nineteenth century. It was created overnight by the efforts of five men—or, more accurately, six. The Five, as they came to be known, were Balakirev, Cui, Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Mussorgsky; the sixth was their forerunner, Glinka.

Glinka was born near Smolensk, in 1804, the son of a rich landowner. He spent much of his life outside of Russia, and his musical training was entirely foreign. His early piano instruction was from John Field, the Irishman from whom Chopin derived the nocturne form; he studied theory and composition in Germany and Italy. Glinka loved Italian opera and his work is strongly influenced by its mannerisms. Nevertheless, he composed two operas, *A Life for the Czar* and *Ruslan and Ludmilla*, which are landmarks in music because they are the first truly Russian operas, being based on Russian stories. In spite of his essentially foreign musical style, the composer was able to tincture these works with a strong native flavour. Glinka's life was in part a tragic failure. He had superior musical gifts, especially for melody and instrumentation, but he wasted much of his life in dissipation. He died at fifty-three, leaving a prophecy for Russian music rather than a fulfilment.

The real beginning had to await the Five, who, in the early 1860s, broke the ground for the institution of Russian music as we know it today. Four of them (and this is the first incredible fact about them) were essentially amateurs. At first only Balakirev could have qualified as a professional musician. Cui was an army officer who became an authority on military engineering and fortifications. Borodin was a chemist of wide repute and a doctor of medicine. Rimsky-Korsakov was an officer in the Russian navy, while Mussorgsky spent most of his life as a government clerk. As young men none of them had any technical training in music. They all learned from Balakirev, who was their mentor and dictator. They met weekly in St. Petersburg, to play and sing, talk and criticize. What resulted from these meetings was something far more splendid than they could ever imagine. For these bold, opinionated, ignorant, inspired young men gave direction and purpose and style to the Russian nationalist movement in music which they sired directly, and they also set the standards for nationalism which were taken up in other countries all over Europe and in the Americas.

Their first success was due to the peculiar character, attainments, and limitations of Mili Balakirev (1837–1910). Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs, *My Musical Life*, describe vividly the genius of this extraordinary man. It seemed that he was born with all the gifts that a musician could hope for. He was a fine pianist, could read music at sight as if it were mere words, and could improvise brilliantly by the hour. He had never studied harmony or counterpoint, but he knew correct harmony, part-writing, and even form intuitively. Though only twenty-four when the group first met, he had the musical erudition of scholars twice his age. His memory was phenomenal; he learned a thing the instant he heard it. Rimsky-Korsakov called him a marvellous "technical critic", for when the other four brought him their efforts at composition "he instantly felt every technical imperfection or error, he grasped a defect in form—at once". In his judgments he was severe, imperious, final. But he held all of

them enthralled by his "alert fiery eyes", his personality, his lightning-quick mind.

Time has proved that with all his gifts Balakirev lacked the creative spark. His ideas flowed too fluently into improvisation. When he tried to set them into final form he was thwarted by an extreme caution. It seemed that the critic in him held the creative artist by the throat. As he grew older and his four disciples turned away from him to careers of their own, Balakirev grew morose and difficult. They would not see him for long periods, and at one time he seemed to suffer a mental breakdown of some kind. The list of his compositions is meagre for so long and intense a career, and only a handful of them survive today—a few of his songs, his orchestral tone poem "Thamar" (on which he toiled for years), and the flashing virtuoso piece for piano, "Islamey".

Of the remaining four, César Cui (1835–1918) had the least to say of permanent value. He was half French, his father having been a survivor of Napoleon's Moscow army who had remained in Poland after the retreat. Cui's distinguished career in the Russian army seemed not to impair his energies for music, for he composed in large quantities and in many forms—ten operas, numerous chamber and orchestral works, and a great many songs and piano pieces. Very few of them appear on programmes today. Cui performed more valuable service as a critic and propagandist. He wrote with vigour and wit, and his articles, which appeared in Paris journals, had the important effect of spreading the new gospel of Russian music abroad.

Alexander Borodin (1834–1887) had, after Mussorgsky, the best musical gifts of the Five. It is one of the major misfortunes of Russian music that his energies had to be divided between music and science. He composed only in the odd hours when his duties as professor of chemistry were not too pressing, or when he felt too ill to attend his classes. Even then this good-natured, utterly charming man was beset by a household as diverting as it was chaotic. Rimsky-Korsakov left an unforgettable account of the Borodins and their domestic circus—a house where no one seemed to care what time it was, and where they often sat down to dinner at eleven o'clock at night; where stray relatives continually moved in to take up residence, get sick, "or even lose their minds"; where pet cats ate off the table and sat on the backs of the guests; where Borodin himself had little privacy and practically no quiet—and yet lived with a devoted wife in complete felicity.

Between chemistry and a lack of organization in his private life Borodin left a catalogue of musical works even thinner than Balakirev's. At his death in 1887 much of it had to be taken over by Rimsky-Korsakov for finishing, editing, and revision. But there is enough to indicate Borodin's great genius—a number of songs of singular originality, the fine Symphony in B minor, two string quartets, the tone poem "On the Steppes of Central Asia", and the opera *Prince Igor*, from which the "Polovetski Dances" are classics of exotic melody, wildly barbaric rhythms, and splashing colour.

Borodin exemplifies, better perhaps than any other of the Five, the advantages and the handicaps under which they worked. Because Balakirev himself understood the technical side of music with remarkable intuition, he discounted the need for technical training for any of his disciples. Thus Rimsky-Korsakov wrote his first symphony when (by his own confession) he was so ignorant of theory that he did not even know the names of the common chords, much less the rudiments of harmony or counterpoint. Borodin was not much better off when he tried to write his first symphony; and throughout his life he had little



time for theory or such luxuries as the study of instrumentation. Intuition guided him, aided by a penetrating imagination and unfailing taste.

All of the Five (except Rimsky-Korsakov) were proud of their theoretical ignorance and eager to set their faces against tradition. They did not want to be influenced by Germanic and Italian procedures that had ruled music for centuries; they wanted to move along the trail broken by Glinka, to a thoroughly Russian music based on folk tunes, church music, and the fantastic treasury of Russian folklore.

Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) was the only member of the Five who refused to remain an amateur. After several years under Balakirev's spell he realized that his inspiration was drying up, so he broke away and committed the unpardonable sin of schooling himself in the technical side of music. While still ignorant of harmony and counterpoint he accepted a professorship in the St. Petersburg Conservatory. He taught by studying the lessons first himself and then keeping a few steps ahead of his pupils. He taught himself orchestration by buying many of the instruments and learning to play them. He toiled through long exercises in counterpoint that would have revolted his fellows.

Before many years had passed Rimsky-Korsakov had become one of the most proficient musicians in Europe. He wrote a textbook on harmony, and a manual of orchestration that is still a classic. Gifted with enormous capacities for hard work and a mind that was orderly and keen, he never tired of improving both his music and his methods. He was composer, conductor, teacher, and editor. He completed and revised various works of Mussorgsky and Borodin after their deaths, and he edited the works of Glinka. In the midst of this lifetime of industry he even found time to write his autobiography, the most absorbing work of its kind after Berlioz'.

Rimsky-Korsakov's temperament might sound like that of a methodical schoolmaster, but it is curious that his musical imagination was the most fanciful and often the most charming of all the nineteenth-century Russians. He loved the picturesque, the extravagantly bizarre. His thirteen operas are nearly all based on Russian legends or dramas, and the best of them (*Sadko*, *Snegurochka*, and *Le Coq d'Or*) are rich in fantasy, jewelled and brocaded like the gorgeous fabrics of the East. His master craftsmanship served him well. For one thing it helped him hide a fundamental weakness of melodic invention. Often his tunes are commonplace, but they are disguised by expert handling—by kaleidoscopic harmonies, or an orchestration of marvellous clarity and brilliance. As an orchestrator, Rimsky-Korsakov stands with Wagner and Berlioz, and a whole generation of modern composers have helped themselves freely from pieces like his "Russian Easter" Overture, "Capriccio Espagnole", and "Scheherazade"—works that might easily be classed as études in orchestration.

During his lifetime Mussorgsky was the least understood and the least appreciated of the Five. Among the group itself there was a prevailing opinion that although he had unusual talent in music he lacked intelligence. "His brains are weak," was Balakirev's bluntly expressed opinion. His music seemed so crude to many of his contemporaries that they classed him as simply a bungler who was never able to assimilate the finer points of harmony, counterpoint, and form. He was so little understood that after his death his best friend, Rimsky-Korsakov, tried to cover up what seemed to be Mussorgsky's musical ignorance. Rimsky-Korsakov edited many of the works for publication, "touching them up to make them more understandable to the public", ironing out the "technical mistakes". This well-meant act of a devoted friend had in the long run a

totally different effect than anyone had foreseen. A new generation arose years afterwards which found the originals far more inspired than the painted-over substitutions. The Mussorgsky who had been belittled as a bungler became one of the dynamos of twentieth-century music, with ideas and technique enough to galvanize some of the best musical minds of the present era.

An understanding of Mussorgsky's place in music today can only come when it is seen in relation to the whole broad scene of nineteenth-century music, and also in contrast to the members of his own small group. For he was unique—in his ideas, his methods, his inspiration, and his personal character.

### III

Russian art music was something entirely new under the sun. It appeared at a time when the great galaxy of German music had reached its zenith and the downward swing had begun, and when the bright beam of Verdi was all that was left of a once-glorious Italian art. The old stars were beginning to set, as there suddenly appeared this aurora borealis, flashing its brilliant multicoloured lights across the night sky.

The Russian composers began with a rare advantage, for they had at hand the vast fund of Russian folk song, a storehouse of magnificent material of which the rest of Europe knew nothing. Ernest Newman has made a penetrating observation on the fundamental difference between Russian and German folk music, as each affected the art music of its area. German folk and art music, says Newman, "have always been so intimately associated that it is hard to say where the one ends and the other begins. . . . The moods, prosody, the structure, the cadence of the folk song run, broadly speaking, through almost all German music, sacred and secular, vocal and instrumental, of the last three hundred years." In Russia, he points out, folk music existed long before art music, because there was no art music of significance until the Five and their immediate forerunners created it. It is to the eternal credit of Balakirev and his fellows that they realized the treasure they had at hand, and began using it in their own way, instead of slavishly imitating German and Italian models.

Thus Russian music is, in the truest sense of a hackneyed phrase, the voice of the people. It sprang directly from the soil. For that reason it has flavours and characteristics more marked than those of any other country except Spain. It is a faithful mirror of the men who made it and of their surroundings. There is reason, therefore, for the heavy reliance of this music upon the minor mode, and for the doleful contours of many of its melodies. They are perfectly expressive of the deep sufferings which generations of the Russian people have endured, and of the grim enormity of their natural surroundings—the steppes that seem to extend with the unbroken monotony of the sea, the ranges of wild mountains, the winter itself with its monstrous cold and its universe of snow. All these have acted to impress upon the Russian soul the helplessness of man in the face of indifferent forces of Nature.

And then there is the note of orientalism which crops out in Russian art-as unexpectedly as it does in the faces of Russian men and women. Borodin was the first to make extensive use of the idioms of Eastern music, and his success was so marked that he had many followers among the Russians. With skill he captured the curious combination of simplicity and subtlety in the oriental melody and the suave, languorous melancholia of its spirit; he showed how these could be translated into the more sophisticated medium of Western music.

Finally there was the music of the Russian Church, whose ancient modal style left its impress on both the liturgies of the country and much of the secular life upon which it impinged.

The use which the Five and their successors made of this diverse and wealthy material made a profound impression all over the music world. In England and Norway, in Spain and Bohemia, composers went scurrying to the highways and byways in search of folk material from their own soils, eager to emulate the brilliant achievement of the Russians. The cult of nationalism was under way.

Generally speaking, the procedures of four of the famous Five were basically similar, and through their work run common virtues and common faults. They worked best in the smaller forms; they leaned heavily upon colour and harmonic richness; there is a strong sense of the pictorial about everything they do. They were less successful in the abstract and as builders in the large forms. Borodin's string quartets and his symphonies stand practically alone in this category; and, fine as they are, they indicate the struggle their creator had in a medium which was too big for him. The first requisite for success in all the larger forms of art is the same—organization of material; and the ability to organize, to plan, to map out on a big scale is a skill that seems in some mysterious way to have racial roots and sources. The early Russian composers clearly lacked it, as did every other racial group in music at that time except the Germans, who had been working at the problem for centuries.

While Mussorgsky's work must be included in many of these generalizations about Russian music, it must be carefully excluded from others, for the reason that many of his aims were often totally at variance with those of his fellows. Even though he used the externals of nationalism as they did, he was not simply a nationalist. He was never beguiled by colour *per se*. Very early in his career he discovered that the abstract forms appealed to him even less than they did to his four friends, but he did not become a painter of pictures. As soon as he turned to opera and to songs he had found his *métier*. These are the two musical forms which are primarily concerned with the minds and the hearts of men—a significant fact. Human sympathy is the motivating force behind everything that is best in Mussorgsky's art. There is no Mussorgsky symphony, no string quartet, no sonata—almost nothing in the abstract. But his single finished opera, *Boris Godunov*, and his sixty-odd songs are beyond doubt the finest works produced in the entire first century of Russian music.

Mussorgsky's life was a chronicle of misery, of a kind not readily understood by Western peoples. We can perceive the unhappiness caused by disappointment and frustration and loneliness; that Mussorgsky had aplenty in his lifetime. But he was also pursued by a terrible melancholia, some of which seemed to spring from bleak periods of creative inertia, some from sources in the Russian soul which her greatest novelists have tried to fathom and explain. Towards the end of his life he was a man struggling against the worst of all adversaries—himself. Often he suffered simply from the way his mind reacted to the spectacle of other human suffering around him. It moved him to the profoundest depths of his soul, and he struggled fiercely to express what he felt in his art. Like Rembrandt and Van Gogh, Dostoevski and the Shakespeare *King Lear*, he gazed into the abyss of life. Like Van Gogh, his own spirit lacked the tough insulating covering which must bring the artist himself through so searing an experience. The painter was driven insane; Mussorgsky drank himself to death.

His own art helped to kill him. For what he had to say in music there was as

yet no technique. He had to invent much of it. Lacking the immense creative energies of a Beethoven or a Wagner, the frustrations attendant upon his efforts broke him soon after he reached middle age.

## IV

Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky was born in 1839 in the village of Karevo, which lay a few hundred miles to the south of St. Petersburg. The Mussorgsky family were landowners of the old Russian nobility, but the composer's maternal grandmother was a serf. By the middle of the nineteenth century they were land-poor. The composer's childhood was spent chiefly at the old ancestral country house where for years the Mussorgskys had lived the easygoing, monotonous life of a decaying gentry, isolated by vast stretches of plains and forests. His mother, whom he adored, was a woman of culture and sensitivity. She saw to it that he learned to speak French as all aristocratic Russians must (Turgenev, it will be recalled, learned French before he did Russian), and she encouraged the boy's talent for music. At the age of nine he was a remarkable pianist. The next year he was sent to a fashionable school in St. Petersburg, which was operated along the lines of a German classical gymnasium. After that came several years in a cadet school, so that by the time he was seventeen he was ready to enter the Preobrazhensky Guards, a regiment formed by Peter the Great, in which many of his ancestors had served. Mussorgsky spent four-years in the military service, and the only thing he learned from it was the drinking habit which later killed him. The ability to withstand excessive dissipation was a necessary part of the equipment of every young officer.

One day in the corridor of a military hospital he made the acquaintance of a young doctor, Alexander Borodin, who later became his fellow member of the Five. According to Borodin, Mussorgsky at that time was "very elegant . . . uniform spick and span . . . His feet were small and neatly turned outward. . . . His hair curled and scented with the utmost care, his hands exquisitely manicured. . . . His manners were elegant and aristocratic and he spoke with a slight nasal twang, employing a large number of French expressions, sometimes a little *recherché*." In polite company he delighted the ladies by playing the piano, "very sweetly and pleasantly, with some affected movements of the hands". He played pieces from *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. Borodin's description is both vivid and curious, for it bears so little resemblance to the man Mussorgsky later became.

All during these years in the army Mussorgsky was passionately interested in music. His first meeting with Balakirev occurred when he was eighteen years old, and not long afterwards their musical association began. About this time the young man suffered some kind of nervous breakdown. He was gripped by a paralysing melancholia, brought on, he said, by "mysticism, aggravated by cynical thoughts about the Deity". Lord Byron was partly responsible. Mussorgsky and Balakirev both read *Manfred*, with results not uncommon among young intellectuals of that time. "I was so wildly excited by the sufferings of that lofty spirit," wrote Mussorgsky, "that I cried out, 'How I wish I were Manfred!'" And then, "I became Manfred for a time, literally—my spirit slew my flesh."

These words have a familiar ring. They sound like Hector Berlioz and all the other furiously romantic young men who lived in Paris in the 1830s.

When he was twenty years old Mussorgsky quit the military service so that

he could devote his life entirely to music. He was now completely under Balakirev's spell, but it would be an exaggeration to say that the music he produced at this time showed anything more than moderate talent. He had tried his hand at a symphony, a few piano sonatas which have since disappeared, a couple of scherzos, and a number of songs. These early songs were lost for many years. In 1909 a French critic finally found seventeen of them in manuscript form in Paris. Mussorgsky also tried to write incidental music to Sophocles' *Oedipus*, but soon gave it up. Only a single chorus survives. The same year (1860) he started "A Night on the Bare Mountain", the orchestral fantasy on which he worked on and off for years but never finished. It was completed by Rimsky-Korsakov after his death.

When Czar Alexander II issued the famous ukase of 1861 which abolished serfdom, it happened that Mussorgsky was one of those whom it affected disastrously. The family fortune, like those of all other moderately wealthy landowners, shrank away to nothing. The composer's mother had to give up a fine house in St. Petersburg and retire to the old estate in the country. In spite of his personal misfortune Mussorgsky sympathized wholeheartedly with the serfs, but it was not long before he began to feel the pinch. In 1863, when he was twenty-four, he was forced to go to work.

He got an appointment as an official in the Engineering Department of the Ministry of Transport. For the next eighteen years he toiled away at a dreary clerical job, a small cog in the enormous Russian bureaucratic machine. He worked every day from eleven to four, at a miserable salary. In the late afternoons and on Sundays and holidays he tried to compose. What little hope he may have had of escaping from these toils vanished in 1865, when his mother died. The old estate at Karevo had to be sold; the Mussorgskys' last hold upon the land of their forebears was relinquished for ever. The composer had another bad nervous collapse, and it appears that at this time began his long struggle against alcohol.

It would be hard to recognize in this intense, high-strung, neurotic man much else than a dilettante in music. He might well have served as a model for a type portrayed by the Russian novelists of that period (Turgenev could have drawn him to perfection): a young man who talked passionately of his plans and ideals but never seemed to realize any of them; who started much but finished little; who stymied himself and his accomplishment in a maze of introspective thinking; who suffered from the prevailing disease of the Russian aristocrats—laziness; and, above all, whose entire being was saturated by a devastating pessimism.

The first clear indication that Mussorgsky's genius was great enough to force itself through these weaknesses of his character came when he was twenty-four years old. He read Flaubert's newly published novel *Salammbô*, and set about with zeal to make it into an opera. He fashioned his own libretto and worked for more than a year on the music before he finally abandoned it. Fragments of *Salammbô* survive, and they offer a peculiar aesthetic problem for music theorists. In later years Mussorgsky lifted certain sections of this score and used them in other works of a totally different character—notably in his operatic masterpiece *Boris Godunov*. The composer completely reworked and revised these sections; nevertheless it must remain one of the enigmas of the creative processes of an artist that his inspiration for the molten passions and the sultry gorgeousness of Flaubert's *Carthage* could also be made to serve him with perfection for the story of a regicide in seventeenth-century Russia.

## V

After the abandonment of *Salammbô* there followed a period of two years in Mussorgsky's life (1866-68) during which he gave up attempts at large-scale works and devoted himself to writing songs. He produced about twenty, and some of them are the finest and most original art songs produced by anyone after Franz Schubert.

It is clear that Mussorgsky's whole equipment, both musical and temperamental, was perfectly geared to the creation of songs, yet he seems never to have fully understood that fact at any time in his career. His musical life was strewn with the ruins of large enterprises which he abandoned at various stages of incompleteness. He lacked both the organizing skill and the creative endurance which labour in the big forms requires. *Boris Godunov*, his operatic masterpiece, is the one exception, and even it presented problems in structure which the composer struggled for years to solve. The song, however, was a totally different matter. It did not require sustained effort; the formal problems were comparatively simple (he simplified them even further); and the opportunities for freedom of expression were large. Moreover, the composer's sympathies were overwhelmingly urged towards certain of the materials out of which songs through the ages have been made, i.e. the minds, the emotions, and the hearts of men.

The Mussorgsky songs are noteworthy first of all for their variety. They are so widely dissimilar that it is hard to group them or classify them, except in those cases where the composer himself arranged them in cycles. In subject matter they were absolutely unique in their time. Only a small number could be termed "love songs" of the sentimental type; the accepted subjects for songs of the romantic era—romantic affection flowers, the beauty of Nature—are conspicuous by their absence. In his technical procedures Mussorgsky was also wholly unconventional. Few of these pieces fall into the accepted "songs forms", the stencil patterns which had been used by song-writers for generations. The composer permitted himself complete freedom in following the lead of the words. He began ignoring old-fashioned notions about keys; he modulated freely (often with daringly harsh progressions); if he preferred he would end a song in a different key from which he began it. Some of his songs had no cadences at all. He did not even hesitate to rewrite the words of the poems that he used, often changing the sense of the original poem to make it conform to his own conception of the subject. He wrote the words of a number of his finest songs himself.

One of the works which typifies his methods—and his genius—is the famous "Savishna" ["The Love Song of the Idiot"]. This is the plaint of the village idiot for love and sympathy. The unfortunate creature, despised and ill-treated by everyone, has secretly adored one of the prettiest girls in the village. He finally tells her—bursts out with a breathless, agonized declaration of his grotesquely hopeless passion. Mussorgsky actually witnessed such an episode, when he chanced to be watching an imbecilic beggar from the window of a farmhouse. He was terribly moved, and he set down to his own words a song that is without a peer in music. The piece is cast in five-four time, an unusual rhythm to suit the droning contour of the words. The melody itself is hardly more than a single motive repeated over and over, measure after measure, with no rests between—as if the wretched man were pouring out his words in a stream, before he can be interrupted or laughed at. The harmonic scheme is equally dis-

torted—a bitter clashing of open fourths and fifths, mingled with rough progressions.

"The Orphan Girl" is a song of the same vintage, totally different in style. According to Kurt Schindler, Mussorgsky used as his melody for this affecting piece an actual tune sung by wandering beggar groups in Russia. Again he wrote the words himself, bitter words which describe a child (one of the hundreds who once roamed the streets of St. Petersburg) begging for a few pennies that she may not die of hunger or freeze to death. This is an unbearably poignant song which must haunt the thoughts of anyone who has a child of his own. Mussorgsky's words are devoid of sentimentality, as his music is a model of poignancy and restraint.

Along with his unbounded sympathy for his fellow men, Mussorgsky had a biting sense of humour. He saw deep into people's hearts, and he told freely not alone of the pathos of what he observed but also of the irony and the absurdity. "Gathering Mushrooms" is the tale of a young peasant woman who picks mushrooms in the forests and speculates on the possibility of poisoning her husband with toadstools, so the way will be clear for her fair-haired young lover. The magnificent "Hopak" has a similar theme: a young Cossack woman dances furiously to forget her life with an old husband whom she hates. Still other songs, like "The Ragamuffin", "The Goat", and "The Seminarist", range from buffoonery to sophisticated satire.

Practically all of Mussorgsky's songs are a test for the capabilities of the singer. Vocal beauty, musicianship, intelligence are not enough. Above all the artist must be able to feel deeply and to project his emotion with the skill of an actor. In certain of the songs he must actually play several parts. Mussorgsky himself was an actor and mimic of unusual ability, and in the performance of his own songs he was incomparable. Among groups of his friends and at musical soirees everyone waited eagerly for him to sing. A performance of one of his new songs was an event.

In spite of their power and originality these songs were slow in reaching the general public, and for years after the composer's death they were neglected. The reason is fairly evident. Few of them conformed to the accepted standards of the age in which they were written. They were not "romantic" at all. Mussorgsky's work was in fact one of the signs and portents that the great romantic movement in world art was at last beginning to break up. It was giving way to the next major stage—that of realism.

Realism began and had its farthest-reaching effects in the field of literature. Here the urge of the artist to describe men and their world exactly as they are was a logical revulsion from the dream world of romanticism. It marked the next turn in the evolutionary art cycle which has taken place many times in history. The beginnings of the realism of the present age can be traced as far back as Rousseau's *Confessions*, but they become clearly discernible with Stendhal. Thereafter the slow, steady conquest of romanticism by realism is evident in the literature of every country. In France the change begins with Stendhal, Balzac, and Hugo; it extends through Flaubert to a climax in the extreme and often shocking "naturalism" of Zola—a master whose influence spread to America in the late nineties and became one of the generating spirits behind the most forceful American writers of the past four decades.

If French realism was the most influential, it was Russian realism which touched the greatest heights. Gogol and Turgenev, Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Gorky—a long line of Russian masters drew out all the amazing range

of colours in the instrument of life, painting not merely with photographic exactitude but with all the subtlety, the depth, the fantastic range of introspective thought that the Slavic mind could bring to the problem.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Mussorgsky began any such clearly defined movement in music as these men were part of in literature. For one thing his influence in music had to stand aside and wait for the sudden appearance on the scene of impressionism (just as realism in painting was delayed by the same movement); for another, realism has never, even to this day, emerged as a clearly defined phenomenon in music. But when Mussorgsky was a young man the ideas of the realists were in the air, and he could not help but be influenced by them, attuned as he was with an almost abnormal sympathy for all human life around him. Painfully he groped to find some way of expressing in music what realism stood for in literature and in painting.

He wrote to Ilya Repin, one of the foremost of Russia's realistic painters: "It is *the people* I want to depict; sleeping or waking, eating or drinking, I have them constantly in my mind's eye—again and again they rise before me, in all their reality, huge, unvarnished, with no tinsel trappings."

## VI

One of Mussorgsky's close friends was the composer Alexander Dargomyzhsky. This man was older than the Five (he had been an intimate of Glinka) but he too was an advocate of Russian nationalism in music. He was also fanatically devoted to the new idea of realistic truth in art. In the middle sixties he began work on an opera called *The Stone Guest*, based on Pushkin's version of the Don Juan legend. Dargomyzhsky expressed his credo as follows: "I want the note to be the direct representation of the word—I want truth and realism." To this end he tried to discard all the old operatic conventions of aria, recitative, chorus, etc., and to set his entire opera in what he called "melodic recitative". He tried to set every line of Pushkin's text, without any alteration, to melody that was controlled at every point by the precise inflections of the words.

Dargomyzhsky was a keen thinker, but his musical talent was limited. He did not have sufficient inspiration to float so dogmatic a cargo of theories, and *The Stone Guest* (completed and orchestrated after his death by Cui and Rimsky-Korsakov) was a failure. Nevertheless, the work and its composer had a strong effect upon the Five, especially Mussorgsky, whose songs of this period are often miniature examples of Dargomyzhsky's theory. In 1868, Mussorgsky began a comic opera based on Gogol's *The Marriage*. He tried to follow faithfully Dargomyzhsky's doctrine of "melodic recitative" and realistic truth; he tried, too, to use Gogol's lines without alteration. After finishing the first act he dropped the work completely. This time it was not alone that he had wearied of his task. A new project had come up in the meantime which suddenly pushed everything else out of his mind. This was the idea for an opera based on Pushkin's historical drama, *Boris Godunov*.

The story of what happened to Mussorgsky's great opera, *Boris Godunov*, its original creation and its fate thereafter, is a strange tale indeed. Mussorgsky took up the project in the autumn of 1868. He worked as he had never worked before, with furious intensity and uninterrupted zeal. Within two years he had completed the entire opera, including the orchestration. For him this was an



especial triumph. It was the fifth opera he had attempted, and the first to be finished. In jubilation he submitted it to the directors of the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg.

The story of his opera followed Pushkin and was concerned with the culminating episodes in the life of Boris Godunov, the regent who ruled Russia in the turbulent days immediately after the reign of Ivan the Terrible. Boris was a man of strength and ability; but he had secretly murdered the six-year-old Czarevitch Dmitri, who stood between him and the throne.

Mussorgsky's first act centres upon the coronation of Boris, whose ambitions now seem realized. The Czar, however, is visibly oppressed by morbid thoughts of his crime. A pretender appears in the person of a renegade monk named Gregory, who claims to be Dmitri grown to manhood. He is supported by Poles and Cossacks who march on Moscow. Meanwhile the starving Russian peasants are driven to revolt by their sufferings. Boris no longer has the strength to face his adversaries; he is almost insane with remorse. He dies, after a pathetic admonition to his son to rule with wisdom.

After some deliberation the authorities of the Imperial Theatre rejected Mussorgsky's opera. They were repelled by the strangeness of the work, its grim character, its unconventional musical style, and its lack of an important woman's part. Mussorgsky had not felt the need for anything resembling love interest. The interest in his piece centred first around the character of Boris and the Czar's mental struggle against the thought of the blood that is on his soul; and second around the choruses of Russian peasants, whose hardships and bitter destiny are the backdrop against which the whole drama is played.

Mussorgsky was disappointed but not crushed. He set about revising his opera and in 1872 he finished his second version. This, after considerable opposition, was finally produced, on January 24, 1874.

This second version represented a considerable alteration from the first. The composer shifted the order of several of his scenes, he left out others completely, and others he recast; he added several songs and episodes to relieve the prevailing gloominess of mood; most important of all he added the two so-called "Polish scenes", in which the character of a Polish princess (Marina) was brought in as the beloved of Gregory. This second version of *Boris* was the only one ever performed during Mussorgsky's lifetime. Its première at the Marinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg enjoyed a great success. There were the usual howls from the conservative critics and the pedants, but the public seemed to like it. Up to the time of the composer's death in 1881 it had something like fifteen performances. Then for reasons that are not entirely clear it was withdrawn.

In 1896, when Mussorgsky had been dead fifteen years, Rimsky-Korsakov revived the work. Because he believed that his friend's music was a masterpiece marred by amateurish crudities, he made a sweeping revision of the entire score. He left out a number of scenes, he altered and amplified others radically; he shifted the keys, he changed many of Mussorgsky's harmonies, until hardly a bar had been left untouched. Finally, he reorchestrated the whole score. Rimsky-Korsakov believed that with his own masterly technical skill he was making his dead friend's work both brilliantly playable and musically above reproach. His version was in fact a magnificent success. In 1908 he made another version, in which he restored some of the cuts he had made in his first. This second Rimsky-Korsakov version was the one which became known in opera houses all over the world, and in which Chaliapin sang with unforgettable mastery.

Meanwhile, however, there had been more than faint rumblings of doubt. Rimsky-Korsakov was assailed by certain critics who knew the extent of his ministrations and suspected that he had entirely misconstrued Mussorgsky's intentions; but it was not until 1928 that the whole affair suddenly erupted like a small volcano. In that year the Soviet Government published a definitive edition of Mussorgsky's original score (his first and second versions together) based on the composer's manuscripts, which had lain for years in the Russian archives. On February 16, 1928, at the same theatre where his altered version had first been played in 1874, there was given a performance of his *original* score, the rejected version, for the first time on any stage.

There is no need to discuss here the relative merits of the two Mussorgsky versions, except to say that the first is doubtless the one of greater power and originality, and that the Polish scenes especially weaken the second. But as regards the Rimsky-Korsakov versions there can no longer be any doubt whatever. Even admitting his sincerity and the fact that his versions brought lustre to Mussorgsky's name for many years, it can now be seen that Rimsky-Korsakov was guilty of malpractice. He simply had no conception of the fact that his friend was writing far ahead of his time. He remembered only that Mussorgsky had no technical training in music, whereas he (Rimsky-Korsakov) was a master of every branch of technique. What he did was almost to emasculate one of the most potently original works in music.

The changes that Rimsky-Korsakov made are worth noting for a more important reason than simple justice; in case after case they point to acorns of revolutionary procedure by Mussorgsky which grew in our time into oaks of modernism. For example, Rimsky-Korsakov always hated what he called Mussorgsky's "barbarous" harmonic progressions; so in *Boris* he smoothed them out wherever he could. Today, as used to rough progressions and dissonances as to dominant sevenths, we find Mussorgsky's chords superb in their dramatic effectiveness. His harmonic schemes are hard, virile, grim—and marvellously expressive; while under Rimsky-Korsakov's hand they are mellowed into Italian clichés. Mussorgsky's doubling is also hard and strong; Rimsky-Korsakov's is conventional and soft. Much of Mussorgsky's original piano score is without key signature; Rimsky-Korsakov recasts long sections of his into specific keys. This is an aid to sight-reading but it also demonstrates the difference in the thinking of the two men. Rimsky-Korsakov's whole procedure is affected by what he feels is the prevailing key, and he often makes unnecessary harmonic changes to keep the music consistent with the key he has chosen. Mussorgsky, on the other hand, is anticipating modern procedure in thinking outside key boundaries. His score is harder to read but his mind is unfettered, and his harmony as a result gains greater freedom and boldness. Mussorgsky uses many changes of time signature, including odd rhythms like five-four alternating with three-four. Wherever he can Rimsky-Korsakov irons them out to make them easier to read and to conduct, sometimes distorting the rhythmic pulse in doing so. Again, it was Mussorgsky who was writing towards the future.

It is clear that Rimsky-Korsakov knew Mussorgsky too well. Before the former's marriage the two men had lived together, and there were few weaknesses of Mussorgsky's mind and character that Rimsky-Korsakov was not aware of. At times in his *Boris* revisions he hardly gives his friend credit for common sense.

At the present time certain reservations are still being made about the

original *Boris*. Many critics insist that the chief reason for the shelving of the opera a few years after its première was the prevailing weakness of the composer's instrumentation. They hold it a serious handicap to present-day revivals. Again, it would seem that the legends about Mussorgsky's technical ineptitude die hard. The composer probably had no intention whatever of producing in *Boris* a score of orchestral brilliance. The transparency and the gorgeous colouring of Rimsky-Korsakov's versions we know now to be wide of the mark. What Mussorgsky actually strove for was a sombre greyness, a severity in keeping with the psychological character of the story. Moreover, his use of the orchestra was never like Wagner's. The instruments seldom dominate. The operatic centre of gravity remains instead with the singers and the chorus. It would seem therefore that if Mussorgsky's original scoring must be revised the best editor would be the one who touches it least—who strengthens the more obvious points of weakness but lets the prevailing colour schemes alone.

If the history of this opera is complex and perplexing, the conclusion to be drawn from it is a simple one: to have survived such a mauling the piece must have been blessed at the start with vitality of a wholly exceptional kind. No amount of retouching could destroy the superb inner quality of the music. *Boris Godunov* has in fact a character unique among works for the lyric stage. It was the first opera in which the chorus played a part as important as the principals themselves. As an indication of his purpose Mussorgsky gave his second version the sub-title: "Music Folk Drama". He portrayed the Russian peasants with the humanitarian sympathies of a Tolstoy and the honesty of a Zola. These people surge through the sombre drama, a ragged, hollow-eyed, desperate mob, goaded by their sufferings to unnamed and revengeful cruelties. They are as far removed from the operatic chorus of Meyerbeer or Verdi or Wagner as McTeague is remote from Dorian Grey.

Only a great and compassionate heart could have struck so true and so deep a note as Mussorgsky did in these superb scenes. At times he used actual Russian folk tunes, but more frequently it is his own subtle imitations of that idiom which take hold of the listener with gripping force. The crown of his life's effort is the scene before the Church of St. Basil, in which an imbecilic boy, part of a starving crowd which begs Boris for bread, stands weeping in the snow, uttering a prophecy of the gloom of night which is to descend upon Russia.

Second only to the chorus is the character of Boris itself. The similarity between this masterful creation and that of Macbeth has often been remarked. Both are men of strength, driven to murder by an overwhelming ambition. Both pay for their crimes with the slow destruction of their minds and souls. It is sufficient praise for Mussorgsky's art to say that his handling of Boris is Shakespearean in its vividness and power.

The entire score of *Boris* burns with inspiration. In its greater moments it would be hard to find music less hackneyed; while the compression of its musical ideas is nothing less than marvellous. Shakespeare could paint a scene or sum up a man's character in a single line; Mussorgsky does the same with a few bars, sometimes a few notes. Barring the Polish scenes, there is also a wonderful cohesion of style. Melodies, harmonies, rhythms all contribute to a mood that is unmistakably Russian in its prevailing melancholy and to a kind of sombre gorgeousness that is like the beauty of old bronze.

## VII

Mussorgsky was thirty-five when *Boris Godunov* was first performed. Thereafter his life and character went slowly to pieces, until a premature death overtook him seven years later. The reasons for this tragic loss to music are not entirely clear, for we are still ignorant of many of the details of the composer's private life. We know many reasons why he suffered intensely—the disappointments connected with his work, his struggles against poverty and against alcohol, his loneliness—but there still seems to be something lacking in our knowledge to explain the depths of wretchedness to which he sank.

Almost nothing is known of his relations with women. Mussorgsky never married. He had a horror of the idea, for he once said, "When you read in the papers that I have put a bullet through my head or hanged myself, you may be certain that I was married the day before." In his youth he is supposed to have loved a young girl who died; and in later years he was devoted to the sister of a friend who sang many of his songs. But this latter affection seems to have been entirely platonic. If there was anything like romantic love in his later life the composer kept it to himself. It may be significant that among his songs the few which may be classed as love songs are notable for their lack of inspiration.

After the death of his mother Mussorgsky never again enjoyed the comforts of a home. He lived with his relatives and his friends—a lonely, unsettled existence which left him without the roots of security. For two years he shared a small apartment with Rimsky-Korsakov, until the latter's marriage. Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs describe bluntly the change that came over his friend after the completion of *Boris*—"a certain mysteriousness, even haughtiness, if you like, became apparent. His self-conceit grew enormously, and his obscure, involved manner of expressing himself (which had been characteristic even before) now increased enormously." He began the habit of sitting for hours in restaurants, consuming quantities of cognac.

Soon after the completion of *Boris*, Mussorgsky tackled the biggest project of his life, the opera *Khovanshchina*. The problems which this work present to the student of Mussorgsky's art are even greater and more complex than those concerned with *Boris*.

The story of *Khovanshchina* is also derived from Russian history—the struggle between two political and social factions at the end of the seventeenth century. It concerns the so-called Old Believers, the conservatives who had set their faces against the group who were trying to introduce Western ideas. Mussorgsky wrote his own libretto. He devoted himself passionately to the task, spending hours at research into this obscure corner of Russian history. At first the composition of the music progressed rapidly, and the composer's enthusiasm was boundless. But gradually the idea began to get away from him. Never having a grasp of large-scale organization, he began to lose all sense of the proportions that his opera should take. He went on composing scene after scene, until the whole project became a morass in which he floundered around helplessly. For long stretches of time he stopped work on it completely while he tried his hand at other ideas. One of these was a comic opera, *The Fair at Sorotchintzy*, based on a story by Gogol. After sketching out a large portion of this work the composer again lost interest and dropped it entirely. The realization that he now had two more large works in an unfinished state must have weighed upon his mind.

*Khovanstchina* was never finished. When Mussorgsky died in 1881 and Rimsky-Korsakov took over his manuscripts this opera was found in a chaotic state. Parts of it were complete, but others existed only as rough sketches; whole sections that the composer had played at the piano for his friends were never written down at all; almost none of it was orchestrated, and the last scene was missing entirely. There was enough material for two operas instead of one. Rimsky-Korsakov devoted himself to the task of whipping this amorphous mass of music into a playable opera. He made many cuts in the score, piecing together what was left; he composed a final scene, and he orchestrated the entire work. His version was first performed in 1886, by an amateur company in St. Petersburg, after the Imperial Theatre had turned it down. Thereafter the opera remained in oblivion until 1911, when the Imperial Theatre revived it in a splendid production with Chaliapin in one of the leading roles. Since then it has enjoyed success in Russia, but elsewhere has never approached the popularity of *Boris*.

*Khovanstchina*, like Mozart's Requiem, is one of the tragedies of music—and for reasons that are similar. Because the composer left so much of it unfinished we shall never be permitted to know it in the precise and final form which he had in mind. And because during part of its composition he was both mentally and physically ill some of its inspiration falls below the high level he had achieved in *Boris*. As for Rimsky-Korsakov's editorial work, it can hardly be other than suspect, in the light of what he did to *Boris*. It seems clear that if the opera is ever to reach a satisfactory final form it will have to be with the aid of an editor who is more modern in his sympathies than Rimsky-Korsakov was.

Meanwhile, anything like a final evaluation of *Khovanstchina* is an impossibility, and an honest critic may only say what must seem like a combination of platitude and evasion: that the opera is both diffuse in form and uneven in quality, that it cannot offer the concentration of inspired effort that *Boris* does without the editorial help of some new genius.

## VIII

In 1873, while the ideas for *Khovanstchina* were first agitating his mind, Mussorgsky lost one of his dearest friends, a young architect named Victor Hartmann, who died at the age of thirty-nine. The composer was terribly moved. "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, live on," he cried, "and creatures like Hartmann must die?" Later, when a posthumous exhibition of his friend's pictures and water-colours was held in St. Petersburg, Mussorgsky paid tribute by composing a set of piano pieces which he called "Pictures at an Exhibition".

Like so many of his works, this one took years to reach the public; and it finally did so in a form which the composer did not originally plan. Mussorgsky finished his "Pictures" in 1874, but the piece was not published until five years after his death. For years after that it was ignored by concert pianists. It was practically forgotten in 1923 when the French composer, Maurice Ravel, transcribed it for orchestra at the suggestion of Serge Koussevitzky. Its success in that form was instantaneous and sweeping; today "Pictures at an Exhibition" is in the repertoire of every symphony orchestra and is the most popular of all Mussorgsky's works.

Mussorgsky's piece begins with a charming introduction called "Promenade", in which he represents himself as strolling leisurely through the gallery

examining the various canvases. There are ten pictures in all, interspersed with recurrences of the "Promenade" theme, and they are titled: I. "A Gnome"; II. "An Ancient Castle"; III. "Tuileries, Children Quarrelling at Play"; IV. "Bydlo, a Polish Wagon"; V. "Ballet of Chickens in Their Shells"; VI. "Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle, Two Polish Jews"; VII. "The Marketplace at Limoges"; VIII. "Catacombs"; IX. "Baba Yaga, the Hut on Fowl's Legs"; X. "The Great Gate at Kiev".

It is obvious that in this work Mussorgsky would not have to face the problem which was so often his Nemesis—that of extended form. The structure is simplicity itself, being merely a group of ten small pieces bound together by the theme of the "Promenade". The composer might have been writing ten songs, except that his ideas came from pictures instead of the words of a poem. That being the case, his inspiration was largely unfettered, and he produced in these "Pictures" some of the cleverest ideas in modern music. The pieces are not equal in merit, but the best of them are amazingly compact, displaying to perfection Mussorgsky's genius for painting a scene, describing a character, or expressing an emotion with the simplest means. Moreover, these pieces meet the test by which the programme music of that time so often failed: they are self-sufficient. Even though they are wonderfully vivid and expressive when the listener is conscious of the idea in the background, that idea is not wholly necessary to their enjoyment. They have a fascination of their own even as music in the abstract.

Ravel's orchestral version of these "Pictures" is so brilliant that it makes Mussorgsky's original for piano seem almost drab by comparison. Nevertheless, the original is full of remarkable things which testify to the composer's prowess as a pianist and his understanding of the instrument. On the whole the work is eminently playable, while making use of few of the stock pianistic clichés or the standard tricks of showmanship. There are some remarkable inventions in pure sonority, many of them gained by Mussorgsky's unconventional doubling of his chords, especially those in the bass. A section like "Catacombs", only thirty bars long, paints its scene simply but subtly, by means of a series of unconventional chordal progressions, high-lighted by cleverly contrasted dynamics. It must make any pianist deeply regretful that so boldly imaginative a composer left but a single large work for this instrument.

The same year that produced "Pictures at an Exhibition" also marked Mussorgsky's return to song. After Rimsky-Korsakov's marriage the composer had taken lodgings with a young poet, Count Golenishtchev-Kutusov. The Count was twenty-four years old and as hard up as Mussorgsky, but his poetic gifts were exceptional. The composer set a number of his verses to music, and the result was an achievement in Russian song that has never been surpassed.

The first fruit of this association was the great cycle of six songs called "Without Sunlight", written in 1874. These pieces are strange creations for a man of thirty-five and another of twenty-four, for they are full of the melancholia that suggests the close and not the noon of life. All six are mood pieces, usually expressing a pang of sadness at the thought of some vanished happiness. The first song (variously translated as "In My Attic", "Within Four Walls", and "Interior") sets the standard of what is to come: all is silence and loneliness in the little room; nothing is left for the poet but his brooding over moments of lost rapture, little but doubt and sorrow and suffering. The following five songs are called (again there are wide variations in translation) "Thine Eyes in the Crowd", "Retrospect", "Resignation", "Elegy", and "On the River". In all

of them there is the recurring theme of lost happiness, of the depressed mind and the defeated spirit.

There is little doubt that Mussorgsky found in his young friend's verses a mirror for his own tormented soul. The songs which he produced are as remarkable for their restraint as for the completeness with which they express a subtle-poetic thought. From the technical viewpoint they exhibit a definite change in Mussorgsky's style. The melodies are more lyrical than had been his custom, and the composer has not limited himself to Dargomyzhsky's drastic theory of music rigidly controlled by the word. At times there is a total absence of nationalist flavour. We recognize the hand of a Russian by the prevailing gloominess of mood rather than by the appearance of characteristic musical idioms. But the hand of Mussorgsky himself is evident in almost every bar—in the amazingly bold and unconventional melodic lines, in the use of harmonies that must have shocked his contemporaries, and in the accompaniment material that is either richly ornate or sparse and empty to suit the composer's unrivalled sense of dramatic effect.

The cycle "Songs and Dances of Death" was another collaboration with Count Golenishtchev-Kutusov. It consists of four songs: "Trepak" (or "Death and the Peasant"), "Cradle Song of Death", "Death's Serenade", and "Death, the Commander". In the first song a drunken peasant, lost in the snow, dances a *trepak* until he falls exhausted, ready for Death. The second is a dialogue between Death and a mother who watches over the cradle of her dying child. The third is the serenade of Death under the window of a sick young girl. The last song depicts a battlefield covered with bodies. Death rides forth in the moonlight to take command—Death, the real conqueror, bids the dead men march in review before him. Mussorgsky had various other ideas for songs which he intended to include in this cycle, but only these four were ever finished.

The daring subject matter alone would set these "Songs and Dances of Death" apart, but it is the boldness of the composer's treatment which has made them overpoweringly great. Not since Schubert had so compressed a form as the song held music of such emotional power. "Cradle Song of Death" is like a scene from a music drama—ininitely pathetic, and yet by the composer's wonderful art expressed in hardly more than fifty measures of music. "Death, the Commander" is remindful of Schubert's "Gruppe aus dem Tartarus", for it is a scene of horror raised to the point of fantastic grandeur.

One other of Mussorgsky's songs belongs rightfully with these—"After the Battle", written in 1874 to words by the young Count. Again the scene is a battlefield, on which lies a corpse. The dead man is forgotten by his victorious comrades; his torn body is the prey of vultures. Far away at home his wife sings a lullaby to their child, promising the father's safe return; but he lies alone.

The original inspiration for this song was a painting by Vereshchagin, who was famous for his realistic battle pictures. This particular scene of a corpse on a battlefield was so harrowing that it shocked Czar Alexander II. The picture disappeared, and for a time it was falsely rumoured that Vereshchagin had destroyed it because of the Czar's displeasure. At first Mussorgsky was not permitted to publish his song; it did not appear until after his death. "After the Battle" is the most powerful preachment against war ever set to music, a piece of black realism that is remindful of Goya's ghastly scenes of war-torn Spain.

## IX

The last of Mussorgsky's death songs was written in 1877. With the exception of the magnificent satire "The Song of the Flea" from Goethe's *Faust*, written in 1879, he had little more of value to say. The stream of his inspiration had been reduced to the merest trickle. Friends who had known him in the days of his youth were shocked by his wasted appearance. The once-dapper young army officer with the elegant manners and the immaculate uniforms was now a drunkard, going about in old clothes and actually threatened by starvation. Shame and pride kept him to himself. The other members of the Five were now great and famous; he alone seemed to have retrogressed.

In the summer of 1879 a singer named Mme Leonova asked him to tour with her as accompanist through the south of Russia. They went as far as the Crimea, and Mussorgsky seemed to enjoy the respite. Once back in St. Petersburg, he had not long to wait. Early in 1881 he collapsed and was taken to a hospital. Rimsky-Korsakov said that he had delirium tremens.

At first he rallied and many old friends came to see him. Repin came and painted his portrait. The picture is Mussorgsky as he looked barely two weeks before he died, and it is a masterpiece in its cruel realism. The hair and beard are uncombed, dishevelled; the nose is discoloured, the eyes hollow and staring. The composer wears a dressing-gown that is too big for his shrunken frame. It belonged to his friend Cui, who sent it to the hospital. Mussorgsky looks like a man of sixty, but he died on the morning of his forty-second birthday—March 16, 1881.



# *Tchaikovsky*

1840-93



TO TCHAIKOVSKY MUST GO THE PALM: HE REMAINS THE MOST FAMOUS AND THE most popular of all Russian composers. That fact alone is a distinction not easy to ignore, especially in view of the vicissitudes through which this composer's music has passed in the half century since his death. There has been no one in music quite like him, and certainly there has been no music with so remarkable a history of fortune and misfortune.

He remains for millions the arch-Russian nationalist, even though during his lifetime his work was disdained by the Five and their followers as too watery, a dilution of Russian and western European styles. The rest of the world took him up with avidity, until in the early decades of the present century the popularity of his music had reached the stage of a public craze. The institution of the all-Tchaikovsky programme sustained many a symphony orchestra, and many a conductor enjoyed an easy ride to fame on this composer's last three symphonies, his concertos, and his overtures.

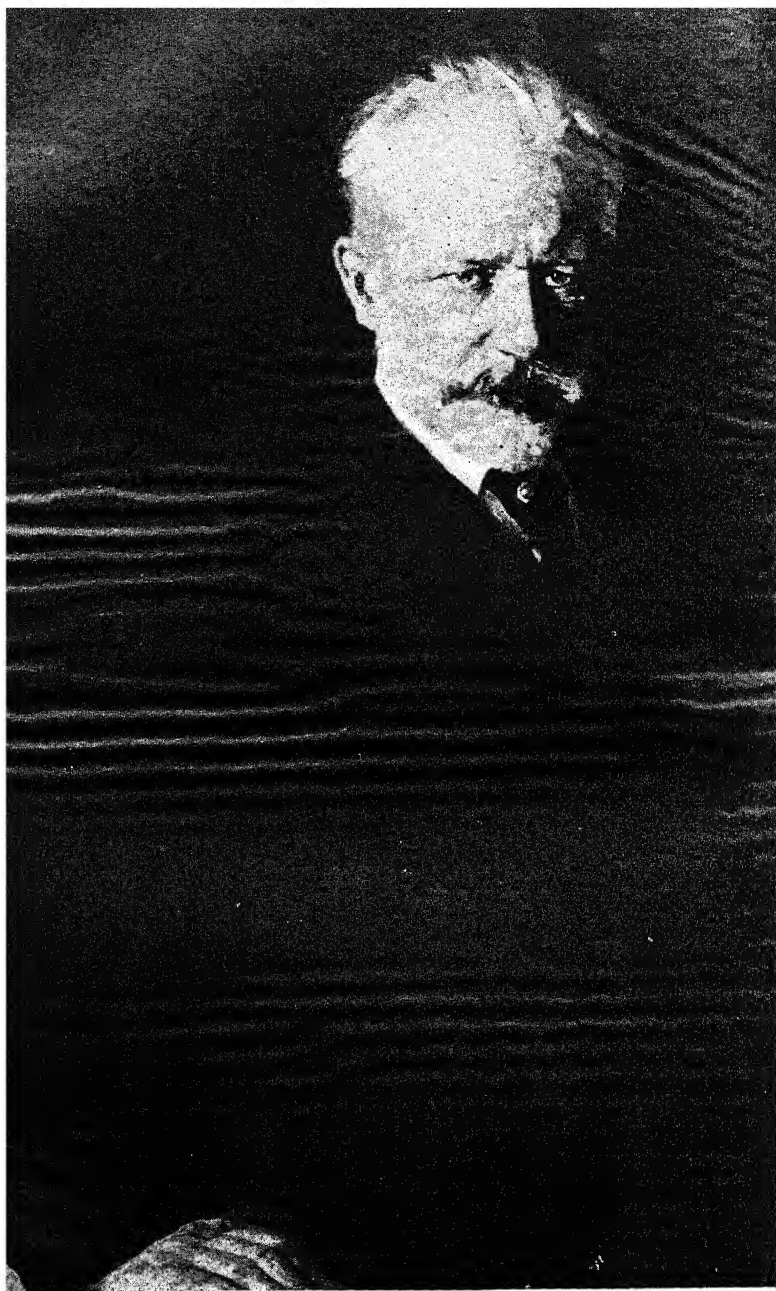
Tchaikovsky, it is now quite evident, belonged among the most extreme manifestations of romanticism in music, and when that entire movement threatened to collapse in the years following World War I it seemed that his work might be buried for ever under the ruins. By 1925 a large section of the public was utterly wearied of him, a natural result of an orgy of overplaying. Critics who had long preached against his excesses and his weaknesses redoubled their efforts, until it became a rare thing for anyone to say a good word for Tchaikovsky. There arose a new generation of modernist composers to whom sentiment and romance were so much mildew on an age best forgotten, and for them the once-omnipotent Russian was an object fit only for ridicule. It seemed for a time that nothing was left for Tchaikovsky's music but to prepare the mortuary inscriptions.

Few of his detractors had reckoned with either the vitality of the man's music or the extent of the public's affection for the remnants of romanticism itself. Romanticism may be dying, but it is not yet dead. Today the people have returned to Tchaikovsky; their regard for him is a sobered and more temperate one, it is true, but with all his faults they love him still. An accolade of a sort has even been accorded him by the special geniuses of Tin Pan Alley who have made themselves several fortunes by vulgarizing some of his best-known melodies into popular songs. Thus the wheel turns full circle: the work of a composer



*[Brown Brothers*

MODEST MUSSORGSKY  
Painting by Repine.



[Brown Brothers

PETER ILICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Painting by Kouznetsov.

who had freely availed himself of folk melodies is returned again to the mass of the people.

The man who created this remarkable and controversial music was one of the strangest characters in the history of music. His entire life was governed, and in part ruined, by an inner tragedy which he hid frantically from the world during his lifetime, but which found its way inevitably into his work. For many years the general public remained mystified and not a little fascinated by the spectacle of this man's secret sorrow, which gnawed at his soul and caused him to break out again and again in his music with wild sobbing and wringing of the hands. Part of the early popularity of Tchaikovsky's music was due to this very fact—that he was the first composer to base a substantial portion of his work on a mood of melancholy, lamentation, and deep despair. Fortunately for him, his secret was well kept during his lifetime and for many years afterwards. Today it is definitely out. It could hardly survive an age in which new conceptions of frankness, the new science of psychoanalysis, and the new art of publicity have all connived to turn men's minds and characters inside out. We understand Tchaikovsky the man much better today, perhaps even with more sympathy; but whether by our complete knowledge of his sorrow we have enhanced our appreciation of his music remains a question.

Tchaikovsky was born on May 7, 1840, in a town in the province of Viatka, which lies in the central part of Russia just west of the Ural Mountains. His father was working in that region as a mining engineer, but later the family moved to St. Petersburg. The Tchaikovskys were fairly well-to-do; the father made and lost several moderate fortunes. Peter Ilich was one of six children—a daughter and five sons, two of whom were twins. The famous son was at first headed for a career in mining engineering, but later his father decided that he should study law. Like Robert Schumann, he loathed jurisprudence, but when he was nineteen he finished his course and took a government job in the Ministry of Justice. Meanwhile he had been trying his hand at music. He went so far as to take private lessons in harmony, but there is no evidence that he showed any special talent at that time.

In 1862 there occurred in St. Petersburg a musical event of prime importance—the opening of the Conservatory of Music, the first of its kind in Russia. It was under the leadership of the famous Russian pianist and composer, Anton Rubinstein. Time has not dealt kindly with this once-leonine figure who inherited the throne of Franz Liszt. We remember only his towering reputation as a pianist; his vast catalogue of compositions is now dust-choked and silent.

Rubinstein was born in Russia, but his career as pianist had taken him all over Europe. His basic musical concepts, like his training, were not Russian but German. Thus the St. Petersburg Conservatory reflected in its curriculum a reliance on the German type of teaching. For this reason the Five and their followers would have none of Rubinstein and his works. To them the Conservatory—any conservatory—was a sink of pedantry. This fact had an important bearing on at least one Russian who later became famous—Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, who entered the Conservatory as one of its first pupils. A few years later, when he made the acquaintance of the famous Five, he was admired personally, but his scholastic training put his work outside the pale. The cleavage which existed between him and the Five had its inception at this point, and it widened as the years went on.

Anton Rubinstein had a younger brother, Nicholas, who was also a musician of immense talent and energy, although overshadowed by the more grandiose

Anton. In 1866, Nicholas founded in Moscow a conservatory similar to his brother's in St. Petersburg. On the recommendation of Anton he offered one of the teaching jobs to Tchaikovsky, who was then one of the most talented students at the northern school. The young man had given up his government post and was trying to make a living by giving private music lessons.

Tchaikovsky took up his post in Moscow early in 1866. The next decade of his life was devoted to teaching and to the production of a long list of early musical works, most of which are now regarded as unimportant and merely preparatory to the main creative efforts of his career. It was a difficult period in the young composer's life. He went through a long struggle in reaching an assured musical maturity, and he had to contend with periods of deep discouragement.

Tchaikovsky suffered from an abnormal shyness. In spite of a personal manner of exceptional charm he found it difficult to meet people; crowds, and especially audiences, filled him with terror. At his first attempt to conduct a group of his own compositions in public he was so unnerved that he did not conduct again for twenty years. He was also painfully sensitive to criticism. A bluntly expressed opinion about his works by someone like the Rubinsteins would shrivel him. At times he was self-critical in the extreme. He destroyed the scores of two of his early operas, *The Voevoda* and *Undine*; and across one of his works he once wrote, "Dreadful muck".

Industry and methodical habits of work were assets heavily in his favour. Early in his career he learned the value of constant and unbroken effort, and for long periods of time he composed every day without fail. He once remarked, "I have patience and have trained myself not to surrender to inertia"—this in contrast to certain members of the Five who, he said, suffering from "lack of self-confidence and self-control, lay their work aside at the smallest difficulty". Soon he achieved great facility, and this in one respect was his undoing. Tchaikovsky composed too much and too easily for his own good. Had he taken more time, had he imposed upon himself even more rigid standards of self-criticism, the body of his work would not be flawed as it is—a splendid fabric marred with the gaping holes of mediocrity.

## II

One of the first products of the composer's early years in Moscow was his first symphony. This was followed in 1873 by a second, and in 1875 by a third. The fate of these three works is unusual, considering the eminence which Tchaikovsky's music once attained. During the height of the Tchaikovsky craze, when his last three symphonies were played repeatedly all over the world, these first three were almost totally ignored. It began to seem as if they could not possibly be as bad as conductors implied by steadfastly refusing to exhume them. In recent years they have been brought to light, with isolated performances and on gramophone records. It transpires that they are not bad works at all, but what defeats them even more than lack of finished workmanship is an absence of sustained melodic interest. Melody, we now know, was Tchaikovsky's greatest single asset. It is interesting to note that in these early works—not alone in the symphonies but in the operas and the piano pieces—he had not yet struck the vein of melodic gold which was to feed all the famous works of his maturity like ore from a bonanza.

The First Symphony caused its composer agonies of creative labour. He suffered a nervous breakdown and spells of prolonged insomnia. The work bore a descriptive title, "Winter Dreams", and in the back of the composer's mind there was a vague poetic scene which had to do with winter journeys and cloud-hung landscapes. The presence of this descriptive programme is a fact worth noting, for it has an important bearing on the big works that were to come. It gives an important clue to Tchaikovsky's creative processes.

The first work in which the composer definitely hit his stride came when he was twenty-nine years old. It was the Overture-Fantasy "Romeo and Juliet"—one of the finest works in his entire catalogue. For the idea of this piece and much of its general form the composer was indebted to that prolific sire of early Russian music, Mili Balakirev. After a brief and stormy period as successor to Anton Rubinstein as head of the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Balakirev had moved in a huff to Moscow. There he became interested in Tchaikovsky. At his suggestion the latter undertook the fantasy on Shakespeare's tragedy, and according to his habit Balakirev took complete charge of the younger man's inspirational effort. He went into elaborate detail about the plan of the work, outlined the main themes, and even suggested the keys of the various sections. Tchaikovsky took full advantage of his friend's counsel. He also revised the piece twice himself, in 1870 and again in 1881, so that the work as we now know it is one of the most carefully wrought of all this composer's scores.

"Romeo and Juliet" is a score of passionate intensity, rich in melody, full of gorgeous harmonies, and making full use of the most glamorous orchestral sound. In spite of his personal shyness, there was never anything reticent about Tchaikovsky the musician; when an idea seized him he flung his inspiration upon the musical canvas with a wild abandon. His colours are all purple and gold and crimson, the shadows are deep and dramatic, the highlights brilliant. In "Romeo and Juliet" we come upon one of the first of the famous melodies which have since sung their way around the world—the dark, richly ornate theme for English horn and muted violas. It is followed by another even finer—a theme of exquisite tenderness, scarcely breathed by the muted strings. Lawrence Gilman wrote that "here Tchaikovsky outdid himself, here, for a moment, he captured the very hue and accent of Shakespearean loveliness". The whole section is worthy of the scene it evokes; it suits the incomparable words:

**JULIET:**     Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:  
                   It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
                   That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;  
                   Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree;  
                   Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

**ROMEO:**     It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
                   No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks  
                   Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:  
                   Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
                   Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.  
                   I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

Not all of "Romeo and Juliet" achieves this inspirational level. There are sections representing the conflict between the Montagues and Capulets which skirt close to bombast and mere noise, a failing which was to become unfortunately common with this composer. But on the whole the piece is one of the most successful of the tone-poem type. It is a work of musical cohesion, in which some fine romantic melodies are bound together with dramatic emphasis.

## III

Five years elapsed before Tchaikovsky produced another large-scale work of similar calibre. Meanwhile he was hard at work—at several operas, various short piano pieces and songs, two string quartets, his second symphony—and though many of these were adding to his reputation in Russia and abroad, the yield in comparison with his later efforts was not a rich one. In the first string quartet (D major, Opus 11) another famous melody was born. Tchaikovsky made use of a folk tune which he heard from the lips of a carpenter working in his house. It appears in the movement marked *Andante cantabile*, which became one of his most successful advertisements as a composer of lush melodies, richly harmonized, gilded with sentiment and melancholy. Like certain less important works of Chopin, it has been played until it is now unbearable to many listeners. This is unfortunate, for despite its sentimentality it has the essential core of real melodic beauty. When all is said and done, Tchaikovsky's skill as a melodist was one at which few have any right to sneer. Igor Stravinsky made that point clear in praising his predecessor's work, while admitting the wide inequality of many of his themes: "The point is that he was a creator of *melody*, an extremely rare and precious gift."

Tchaikovsky was thirty-four years old when he composed his Piano Concerto in B flat minor, Opus 23. This piece, now a fixed and brilliant star in every virtuoso pianist's firmament, had an inauspicious beginning. Tchaikovsky was not himself a piano virtuoso, and after completing the work he felt the need of expert advice on certain of its problems in piano technique. Naturally he sought the counsel of his friend and benefactor, Nicholas Rubinstein, who was one of the first pianists of Europe. Tchaikovsky played the work for Rubinstein on Christmas Eve, 1874—an occasion which he never forgot. Rubinstein listened in silence, and at the end he delivered himself of a blast that froze his shy friend's very marrow. "It appeared," wrote Tchaikovsky, "that my concerto is worthless, impossible to play, the themes have been used before, are clumsy and awkward beyond possibility of correction; as a composition it is poor. I stole this from here and that from there; there are only two or three pages that can be salvaged, and the rest must be thrown away or changed completely!" It is a wonder that the shocked, hypersensitive composer did not destroy either his score or himself on the spot. Instead, he was "speechless with amazement and fury". He announced that he would not change a single note. He did, however, make extensive revisions some years later.

Whether Rubinstein's error in judgment was prompted by jealousy or an unaccountable obtuseness is hard to say. At any rate he talked himself out of a signal honour. He might have given the first public performance of what came to be the most sensational of all piano concertos. Tchaikovsky passed the work over to Hans von Bülow, who took it with him on a tour of America. Bülow first played it publicly in Boston, on October 25, 1875. The audience was so wild with enthusiasm that he had to repeat the entire finale.

The style of Tchaikovsky's famous concerto is derived, of course, from the piano concertos of Franz Liszt. The Russian simply took all the Hungarian wizard's tricks and improved upon them. The soloist performs prodigies of dexterity and strength; at times the piano and the orchestra are antagonists in a roaring war, and on the next page they are lovers sighing out their hearts in close embrace. The whole piece is dramatically constructed to shock an audience

to attention by a magnificently imposing opening and to keep them on an emotional edge to the last note of a frantic finale. The popularity of this concerto has been enormous, and even today after half a century and more of battle it retains its vitality to an astonishing degree. That it is bombastic and at times even meretricious is beyond question, and Tchaikovsky's failing for saying unimportant things in the grand manner is often perfectly exemplified. But again, he redeems himself by sheer force of his melodic material. His are seldom great themes in the noble sense that those of a Beethoven or a Brahms are, but they certainly have staying power.

The B flat minor Piano Concerto spread the name of Tchaikovsky far and wide, until western Europe and America became aware of a new phenomenon in music. Tchaikovsky had stepped ahead of the Five, and it was years before they caught up with him. One of the chief reasons for his popularity outside of his native country was the fact that his music was Russian, but not too Russian. It was soon observed that he was eclectic in his procedures, and that he refused to subscribe to the dogmas of the Five in maintaining a strict nationalism. He mixed his Russian brew with a blend of German and even Italian ideas, and as a result of his compromise he gained a world-wide acceptance which was at first denied the others. His was the popularity of one who simplifies and conventionalizes a new and somewhat recondite movement to make it more immediately understandable to the general public.

#### IV

Anyone who heard the B flat minor Piano Concerto without knowing anything about the composer would in all likelihood gain a totally erroneous impression of his personal character. Tchaikovsky's musical style is one of such passionate intensity, vehemence, and at times even unrestrained violence that it would be natural to expect him to be one of the most masculine of individuals. The impression would be far afield from the truth, farther even than in the case of Chopin. Tchaikovsky was not merely shy and gentle to an abnormal degree; he was definitely a homosexual. That was his terrible secret. After having been hushed up for many years it is today a secret no longer, but is generally acknowledged and understood. The composer's abnormality would be of little importance in a discussion of his creative history, except that his own attitude towards it and his morbid fear of its discovery coloured his whole life, and so his art.

Tchaikovsky lived in an age when an abnormality of this type had to be studied even by medical scientists with something like furtiveness. It could never be mentioned, much less discussed, in polite society. It was observed, of course, by people of sophistication, in circles like those in which the composer moved; but they generally regarded it either as a horror or a joke. Tchaikovsky's case was common gossip among many of his friends in Moscow. He lived in mortal terror that it would spread with his musical fame and become a public scandal. The only person to whom he could go for consolation was his younger brother Modest, who later became his biographer. Modest was also a homosexual, and the two brothers made cryptic references in their correspondence to the sword that hung over their heads.

By a stroke of irony it happened that, in the life of this man to whom women meant nothing, two women nevertheless played the dominant roles. One was a wealthy widow, Nadejda von Meck; the other was a young woman whom the



composer made the ghastly mistake of marrying. Tchaikovsky's relations with these two women were among the strangest that might befall any man, normal or otherwise.

Nadejda von Meck was the widow of an engineer famous in the history of Russian railroad building. When he died he left her an enormous fortune, which included a mansion in Moscow, a huge country estate, and two railroads. At this time Mme von Meck was in her middle forties. She was a born autocrat, and after her husband's death she lived the life of a semi-recluse in her palatial Moscow home. Two interests ruled her life: her children (she had borne no less than twelve) and music. She was a generous patron of the Conservatory, and one of the few callers who were welcome at her home was Nicholas Rubinstein. Through him she became interested in the music of Tchaikovsky. Very soon this interest became a burning passion, and then Mme von Meck and the composer began a correspondence. They wrote to each other constantly, at times almost daily, for fourteen years—from 1876 to 1890. In all that time they never once met.

A large portion of this correspondence was only recently published in English. It appeared in the book *Beloved Friend*, by Catherine Drinker Bowen and Barbara von Meck. The latter is the widow of Mme von Meck's favourite grandson, who had possession of the correspondence until the Revolution of 1917, when it was seized with the rest of the Meck property. Much of it appeared for the first time in 1935, when it was published by the Soviet Government.

Tchaikovsky's letters to his "Beloved Friend" are an intimate picture of the man's character—in all except one detail. The spectre of his abnormality is never once hinted at, and she seems never to have been aware of it; but otherwise he opened his heart and soul to her. His joys and his sorrows, his terrible despairs (both real and imaginary), the inmost secrets of his creative life in music, are all spread out in these hundreds of letters. Within a short time Mme von Meck became Tchaikovsky's patron as well as his confidante. For years she provided him with a regular income; she sent him on trips abroad; she opened her purse with extra gifts whenever the composer asked for help. In short, she became the main prop of his life. He became so dependent upon her generosity and her sympathy that he suffered agonies if a week went by without word from her.

About Mme von Meck's adoration of Tchaikovsky's music there was something almost pathological. Like many women of iron will, she was subject to odd and conflicting impulses. Music moved her deeply; Tchaikovsky's music left her devastated. And yet it was she who imposed the condition that they should never meet. The reason for this was never made entirely clear, but it seems unlikely that she feared Tchaikovsky the man would destroy her illusions about his music. She knew from his letters that he was a person of innate culture and unusual intelligence; everyone who ever met him remarked about that and about his personal charm and magnetism. It seems more likely that Mme von Meck feared herself. She who had borne twelve children was left with an antipathy to the whole institution of marriage. She once wrote to Tchaikovsky the curious commentary: "It is a pity that one cannot cultivate human beings artificially, like fishes; people would not then need to marry, and it would be a great relief." These words have the sound of one to whom the marriage relationship is hateful. Nevertheless, she had to devise an outlet for her passions and her longings. She achieved it by means of this strange love affair which was both vicarious and remote.

There is little doubt that to the composer the arrangement was completely satisfactory. He must have realized that from this wealthy widow's adoration of his music to adoration of him as a man would have been an all too easy step. Then his situation would have been dreadful indeed. Tchaikovsky knew precisely how dreadful, because another woman had enticed him into that very thing.

In the spring of 1877 a young girl named Antonina Miliukov, whom he had met casually, began to write to him. She indicated that she was madly in love with him and wanted to marry him. Tchaikovsky did not then realize that the woman was mentally deranged and that she imagined all men were in love with her. The composer finally agreed to marry her. He afterwards explained this incomprehensible action by saying that she would otherwise have killed herself. Tchaikovsky also had a selfish motive which he did not divulge. In his dread that his own abnormality would become publicly known he imagined that a marriage would somehow remove all source of suspicion. Once before he had attempted the same subterfuge and failed. When he was twenty-eight he had met a glamorous opera singer, Désirée Artôt. He was captivated by her beauty and her accomplishments, and he wrote his father of his intention to marry her. But quite suddenly she jilted him for another man.

Tchaikovsky may really have loved Artôt, for a time at least; but for Antonina Miliukov he had nothing even approaching affection. On the night of their marriage (July 18, 1877) as he sat with her on a train he realized that his wife was utterly abhorrent to him. He thought he would go insane: "When the train started I was ready to scream." The story of the next three months was a Gehenna of mental torture which only a Dostoevski could have described. To avoid his wife the composer would go out at night and walk the streets of Moscow for hours. One night he waded into the Moscow River up to his waist and stood in the icy water as long as he could bear it. He hoped to die of pneumonia and thus be spared the shame of suicide. Finally he fled to his brother Anatole in St. Petersburg, and there suffered a complete nervous collapse. Anatole got rid of Antonina by sending her with her mother to Odessa; then he took his shattered brother to a haven in Switzerland.

Tchaikovsky had not written Mme von Meck a word about his plans until the day before he was married. The news almost killed her, but she concealed her feelings. Her replies were masterpieces of tact and sympathy. It was after the marriage broke up and he had written her in detail of the whole dreadful experience that she promised him an annuity of 6000 rubles (about £600) to make him independent for life.

## V

The year 1877 had more significance in Tchaikovsky's life than the nightmare marriage. In the midst of this turmoil he had been at work on two major projects, the opera *Eugene Onegin* and his Fourth Symphony. The latter was the more enduring work. It was in fact the first of his three famous symphonies which were to form a crescendo of popularity, interest, and importance, as well as the inspirational climax of his entire career.

The Fourth Symphony, in F minor, is not one of Tchaikovsky's more nearly perfect scores, but it is surely one of his most effective. The opening bars are famous—a blaring of wind instruments, stirring and portentous, which seems to

presage events of great moment. The movement which unfolds at length thereafter is melodious, colourful, and highly theatrical. Tchaikovsky himself described his inner "programme" for this symphony, in a letter to Mme von Meck. The introductory fanfare, he said, represented the *Fatum*, "the inexorable force that prevents our hopes of happiness from being realized . . . it is Damocles' sword, hanging over our head in constant, unrelenting spiritual torment. . . . Despair and discontent grow stronger, sharper. Would it not be wiser to turn from reality and sink into dreams?" The varying moods of this first movement are thus an alternation, as in life itself, between "hard reality and evanescent dreams".

The three remaining movements are less convincingly explained by the composer, but the truth is that his whole programme is unnecessary. One is left with the feeling that Tchaikovsky attached his ideas to the music after it was written, rather than before. Musically the slow movement is a disappointment. There is a fine lyrical first theme, but the second is weak and repetitious. Depth and dignity, two requisites for a symphonic slow movement, are lacking. The third movement, on the other hand, is an instrumental *tour de force* which has delighted audiences from its first hearing. The movement is made up of three contrasting orchestral colours—strings (pizzicato throughout), woodwind, and brass. Each group plays separately until the end, when they are joined. The themes are not in themselves exceptional, but the scoring throughout is original and charming. The finale is a whirlwind of melodrama. At the height of the battle's fury the brasses interrupt with the ringing fanfare of the introduction. It is a moment of great dramatic effectiveness. Unfortunately, Tchaikovsky's surrounding melodic material is commonplace, unequal to the splendour and vigour of his bold design.

For a clinical study of Tchaikovsky's mature musical style, the Fourth Symphony offers much that is characteristic. First and foremost this composer is concerned with emotion. It rules his musical thinking. Moreover, his emotions are unrestrained, and their gamut is wide—from the depths of melancholy to the wildest exultation. This was certainly not a new thing in symphonic music; Beethoven, Berlioz, and Liszt were all strong emotionalists. But the Russian raised the voltage until the orchestra became a powerhouse of passion.

So far as form is concerned, Tchaikovsky suffered from a fundamental weakness. Theorists soon observed that his symphonic themes do not show genuine organic growth. Rather, they move in sequences, as a series of melodic ideas contained in a row of boxes, but seldom progressing one into the other. The composer realized his weakness and admitted it. He said that in his music "the seams show". Fortunately, however, he had a redeeming virtue which rescued his best music from scrappiness and lack of cohesive movement. He had a remarkable sense of dramatic form. In this respect he was a true son of Beethoven (whose music he disliked, by the way). He had the born dramatist's feeling for rise and fall of action, for suspense, for climax; he could generate and control his forces and then unloose them until they swept everything before them in one overwhelming momentum.

There is a difference, of course, between Beethoven's effort and Tchaikovsky's. In Beethoven's masterpieces of musico-dramatics (e.g. the opening movements of his "Eroica" and Fifth symphonies, and the "Coriolanus" Overture) both skills are present. Coexisting with the compelling dramatic plan is a superb scheme of pure organic development. More than that, the thematic material is

always equal to the heroic scope of the main design. Thus these movements have a strength that more than a century of excessive playing has not broken down. Where Tchaikovsky fails, at times tragically, is in his choice of thematic material. His ideas drop so easily into the commonplace, even the trivial. When a composer orates from the great rostrum of the symphonic form the listener has a right to expect great ideas. Tchaikovsky was brilliant in the art of declamation, but when one pauses to analyse the substance of his oratory it too often turns out to be largely sound and fury.

As an orchestrator this composer ranks high among the direct heirs of Berlioz. He was one of those lucky composers who have an intuitive command of the instruments, so that he knew how to draw from them a maximum of expressiveness, combined with a splendid clarity. Thus his orchestration is nearly always brilliant. Often it drips with rare and beautiful colours. He was not nearly as great an innovator as his French ancestor, but he contrived many clever effects which were widely copied after him.

The orchestra was Tchaikovsky's natural medium. Of all his large catalogue of works those centring around the orchestra are by far the most successful. A few of his songs and the string quartets are often heard, but in other media the mortality has been heavy. Few pianists bother any more to include him in their repertoires. He composed a great deal for the instrument, but it was mostly in the small forms. He did not have the knack of piano writing, not being a notably good pianist himself. Most of his ideas would sound better in an orchestra. Thus he was the reverse of Schumann, whose symphonies were often conceived in idioms better suited to the piano.

It was Tchaikovsky's lifelong ambition to write a successful opera, and there was hardly a time when he was not occupied with some phase of the task. He finished eight operas in all, beginning with the abortive *Voyevoda* in 1868 and ending with *Iolanthe* in 1891. Most of them represent only a huge waste of creative effort. Tchaikovsky's trouble was a common one. Whatever gifts he had for the musical side of the task were cancelled out by his ignorance of dramaturgy. His pieces were usually all melody and no drama. As a result his efforts in this field caused him some of his worst embarrassments. Several were dismal failures; others enjoyed only a *succès d'estime*. All died quickly, with the exception of *Eugene Onegin* (1878) and *Pique Dame* (1890), which were real successes during the composer's lifetime. *Onegin* especially was a favourite both in Russia and abroad. Today both of these operas have begun to wilt, although they get occasional performances outside of Russia. They are kept alive now by a few isolated excerpts of lyric beauty.

## VI

The years immediately following Tchaikovsky's marriage and the creation of the Fourth Symphony were transitional, both in his life and in his art. In 1878 he resigned from the Conservatory and thereafter he was relieved of the burden of teaching. To any other man his life would probably have seemed exceptionally pleasant. Mme von Meck had made him comfortably independent, and he was free to devote his entire time to music. Her generosity also enabled him to make frequent journeys to Italy, France, and Germany; in the summer she placed her lovely country place at his disposal. His fame spread rapidly. But he was not a happy man. Instead he grew morose and solitary. He lived in

constant fear that his wife (whom he called "The Serpent") would blackmail him.

Part of his unhappiness came from his work. He had achieved a technical assurance and a fluency of invention, but he knew that his inspiration had receded rather than advanced since the Fourth Symphony. The works of this period are seldom distinguished. The only exception is the Violin Concerto, which was written in Switzerland in 1878, immediately after the break-up of his marriage.

The Violin Concerto had a history much like that of the Piano Concerto in B flat minor. Tchaikovsky dedicated it to the celebrated violin teacher, Leopold Auer, who was just starting his long career as professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Auer was not impressed by the work. He liked only the first movement; he thought the rest contained too much that was unsuited to the instrument. Three years went by before a violinist named Adolph Brodsky had the courage to conquer the technical difficulties of the piece and try it in public. He played it in Vienna late in 1881. The composer did not learn of this performance until some time later, when he chanced to read a review of his piece by Eduard Hanslick. That ornament to the critical profession made a fool of himself by erupting volcanic lava over the entire work. Tchaikovsky was terribly hurt by the excoriating words; he remembered them until he died.

The concerto ultimately became one of the most popular works ever written for the violin. For years it ranked with the concertos of Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and only recently has it shown signs of waning. One of the best estimates of the work is that of Fritz Kreisler, who was for years one of its most brilliant interpreters: "I think the concerto is a lovely work. It has, like everything by Tchaikovsky, an unending source of melodic invention. But it also shows, more than any other of Tchaikovsky's compositions, lack of workmanship." In an effort to correct some of its faults Kreisler made a revision of the concerto, which he performed with the Philharmonic-Symphony Society of New York in 1939. He made certain cuts, various changes in the instrumentation, and he rewrote completely the cadenza in the first movement. It is significant that the result, although a formal improvement, seemed to add little to the stature of the work. Rather it proved that this concerto has been popular for nothing more than its sentimental melodies and its opportunity for acrobatic tricks of technique. It was a typical product of the later nineteenth century, a period in which the repertoire of the violin was degraded almost beyond recovery by sentimentality and display. That Tchaikovsky's concerto could succeed in spite of its lopsidedness and its lack of formal beauty is both a tribute to the vitality of his melodies and an indictment of the entire trend of violin composition during a period of a hundred years.

Shortly after the Violin Concerto came another opera, *Joan of Arc*, which enjoyed a mild success. The critics damned it. They were led by Cui, who said it was the worst thing Tchaikovsky had yet written. Four years later when *Mazeppa* was produced Cui found that Tchaikovsky had achieved the impossible, in writing a worse opera than *Joan of Arc*. To this period also belong the first three orchestral suites. These pieces contain isolated movements of melodic beauty and charm, and at times a splendid craftsmanship; but they too are spotted with mediocrities. The Second Piano Concerto (1880) is in no class with the First. The "Italian Caprice" and the "1812" Overture were enormously popular works in their time, but their colours have long since faded.

The "1812" Overture used to be a favourite closing work on "all-Tchaikovsky"

programmes. It was the nearest thing to an explosion that had yet been devised for the concert hall. The piece was written on order for a mammoth exposition in Moscow, and was supposed to depict the epic struggle between the French and the Russians in the year 1812. The first performance took place in 1882 in front of a cathedral in the Kremlin, and the original plan called for a huge orchestra augmented by a band of brass instruments, with the big bass drum part doubled by shots fired from cannon. Tchaikovsky detested the piece even while he composed it. He confided to Mme von Meck that it "will be very showy and noisy, but it will have no artistic merit because I wrote it without warmth and without love".

In 1885 the composer established himself in a modest house near Klin. There he enjoyed the isolation and the closeness to Nature that he loved. The place was furnished, it was said, in atrocious taste; but the composer was comfortable and as near peace as a man of his temperament could expect. He had a sign on his gate which bluntly told visitors that he received on Mondays and Thursdays from three to five. Otherwise he was "not at home. Please do not ring." Here he lived quietly, walked daily through the countryside, read philosophy, studied English, composed with regularity, and drank heavily every night. "For me," he wrote, "a man harassed with nerves, it is simply impossible to live without the poison of alcohol." Fortunately for him it never became the vice that ruined Mussorgsky. His capacity for liquor was enormous.

It was in this house in Klin that Tchaikovsky composed one of the most ambitious works in his catalogue—the "Manfred" Symphony. With better luck it might have been one of his finest. "Manfred" as we know it is a piece of vast proportions, overlong, stuffed with exasperating inequalities, and yet containing ideas which, had they predominated, would have raised this symphony to a rank of unassailable greatness.

The idea of writing a programme symphony around Byron's dramatic poem was another scheme of Balakirev's. He had been hypnotized by the poem ever since he and young Mussorgsky had read it together, years before. He tried at first to interest Berlioz in the idea—certainly the right man for the fantastic nightmares of Byron's hero. Fifteen years after that, in 1882, he put it up to Tchaikovsky. As in the case of "Romeo and Juliet", Balakirev provided a complete scenario. Tchaikovsky waited for three years before he made a start on the music, and even then he undertook the task with misgivings.

The composer indicated in his score the programme of each movement, and in the main he followed Balakirev's plan. The first movement depicts the soul-tortured Manfred wandering in the Alps, "racked by remorse and despair . . . a prey to sufferings without a name. . . . The memory of the fair Astarte, whom he had loved and lost, eats his heart. Nothing can dispel the curse which weighs on Manfred's soul. . . ." The second movement depicts the Fairy of the Alps appearing to Manfred beneath the rainbow of the waterfall; the third is a peaceful Pastoral. The last movement is in the underground palace of Arimanes. "Manfred appears in the midst of the Bacchanal. Evocation of the ghost of Astarte . . . Manfred's death." Of course there would be an *idée fixe*. It runs through the work in the form of a motive portraying Manfred himself.

Byron's original poem is in itself a monument to a pretentious, overblown, and feverish romanticism—romanticism which strained for the rarefied realms of metaphysics and ended up by being desperately and passionately ridiculous. The multitude of ideas got completely away from Tchaikovsky, and he produced

a score so long, sprawling in form, prolix, and variegated that the entire effort has generally been written off as a failure. This is unfortunate, for some of the "Manfred" Symphony is definitely worth rescuing. The fundamental fault, moreover, does not lie alone with the composer and his lack of self-criticism. Part of the blame must go to the form of the programme symphony itself.

It is a significant fact that, beginning with the prototype of all such works, the "Fantastic" Symphony of Berlioz, there has never been a completely successful programme symphony. No one can deny the greatness of the Berlioz work, its originality, its sweeping, passionate vitality, its place as a landmark in nineteenth-century music; and on the other hand no one can deny that it is so uneven as to constitute one of the most baffling disappointments in symphonic music. The same composer's "Harold in Italy" Symphony is more weakly uneven, while the "Romeo and Juliet" was described by Wagner with brutal directness: "Piles of rubbish lay heaped up among the most brilliant inventions." The "Faust" and "Dante" symphonies of Franz Liszt have almost disappeared from modern programmes. The "Domestic" Symphony and the "Alpine" Symphony are long steps downward in the retrogression of Richard Strauss's art. What has defeated composers in so many cases has been the necessity of serving two masters—i.e. the literary scenario and the fundamental classic structure of the symphony itself. The two seldom agree; generally they are at war. Tchaikovsky himself noted that fact when writing his "Manfred" Symphony: "It is a thousand times pleasanter to compose without a programme. When I write a programme symphony I always feel that I am not paying in sterling coin, but in worthless paper money."

If Tchaikovsky (perhaps years later) had gone through this symphony with a pruning-knife, disregarding the details of his cumbersome scenario and leaving only those portions which were fresh and green with the life of real musical inspiration, he would have had a fine score. For that is precisely what a conductor must do today when he wants to make the "Manfred" Symphony worth playing. The first movement is on the whole a good one. It has tremendous emotional force; the tortured soul of Manfred is exposed in themes of sombre beauty and distinction. There are none of the easy Tchaikovsky clichés, and no cheapness. Manfred has tragic majesty, unalloyed by Byronic sentimentality or excess. The second movement sags badly, while the third is spoiled by a central section overloaded with *Sturm und Drang*. The last movement rises again to the inspiration of the first—provided an unnecessary and monstrous fugue near the end is cut out completely. The death of Manfred at the close is the best piece of writing that Tchaikovsky had yet done and is a forecast of the "Pathétique" Symphony.

The composer knew what was wrong with his "Manfred". Three years after its composition he confided in a letter that to him it was "a repulsive work, and I hate it heartily, all except the first movement. In the near future I plan to destroy the three last movements, which are musically simply trivial (except the final movement, which is impossible). So, from a piece of music that is much too long for a symphony, I shall make a symphonic poem." This was too drastic a judgment, but it is a pity that the composer was not spared to give "Manfred" a revision with the mastery he had gained in the closing years of his life.

## VII

In 1887 an event occurred which changed the later course of Tchaikovsky's life. He was finally persuaded to conduct a performance of one of his operas. The conducting experience of years before had seared his soul, and he undertook the task suffering agonies of nervousness. To his astonishment he was able to acquit himself so creditably that he received an ovation from the audience. As a result he made a tour of western Europe, conducting various noted orchestras in performances of his own works. Thereafter he made several international tours, one of which took him to America. The shy, neurotic man to whom strangers, audiences, and crowds were so many nightmares finally came out of his shell. At times he seemed actually to enjoy the public ovations. He was by no means a great conductor, but audiences everywhere took the occasion of his personal appearance to give evidence of their affection for his works. He had already become one of the most popular composers in the world.

The tour of 1888 took him to Leipzig, Hamburg, Berlin, Paris, and London. At the ancient Leipzig Gewandhaus, still the stronghold of German classicism, this foreigner and romantic interloper played his music with a quaking heart. But he was astonished. The audience recalled him twice, the Leipzig equivalent of an ovation. In the same town he met Johannes Brahms. His remarks about his German contemporary are remembered for their honesty rather than their perspicacity. He found Brahms the man quite likable: "Very simple, free from vanity, his humour jovial. . . ." But, "There is something dry, cold, vague, and nebulous in the music of this master which is repellent to Russian hearts. From our Russian point of view Brahms does not possess melodic invention. His musical ideas never speak to the point; hardly have we heard an allusion to some tangible melodic phrase than it disappears in a whirlpool of almost unmeaning harmonic progressions and modulations, as though the composer's special aim was to be incomprehensible and obscure. . . . It is all very serious, very distinguished, apparently even original, but in spite of all this the chief thing is lacking—beauty."

Tchaikovsky's remarks were by no means the products of either ignorance or a lack of musical taste. They expressed an opinion of Brahms's music which was widespread at that time and which can be heard on occasion even to this day. Tchaikovsky was a shrewd observer of the music of other composers, and his opinions, even when wrong, often contained flashes of rare perception. He said of Liszt's compositions that "they show more poetic colouring than true creative power, more paint than drawing". Wagner's musical style baffled him: "Not one broad, finished melody, not once is the singer given leeway." The librettos and characters he found "impossible . . . unnatural"; but he insisted that Wagner was primarily a symphonist and a wonderful one. The principal defects of Berlioz he described as "poverty of melody, overharmonization and an imagination too rich for its owner's musical invention. Berlioz was a high-minded man who conceived beautiful things but lacked the power to fulfil his conceptions". He knew that Glinka was at heart a dilettante, whose work was a mixture of triviality and genius; while he put his finger instantly on Bizet's *Carmen* as one of the real masterpieces of the lyric stage. In Tchaikovsky's opinion the supreme composer was Mozart, whom he adored blindly. Mozart's perfection of style and workmanship reminded him of Raphael.



Shortly after his return to Russia from the first international tour Tchaikovsky set to work on his Fifth Symphony, in E minor. It was written in about two months, during the summer of 1888. For some time the composer had been brooding over the possibility that he was played out. He even wrote to Mme von Meck of his fear that his inspiration had dried up and that it was time for him to quit. He worked hard on his symphony to prove to himself that his own fears were groundless. The first performance of the work left him more despondent than ever. When he conducted it in St. Petersburg later that year, and in Prague, it fell flat. "It is a failure," he wrote to his confidante. "There is something repellent in it, some over-exaggerated idea of colour, some insincerity or fabrication which the public instinctively recognizes." He went on to say that his Fourth Symphony was a far better work.

It is interesting to note after more than half a century how much of the composer's estimate of the Fifth Symphony fell wide of the mark and how much was damningly true. The work certainly was not a failure. It became one of the most popular symphonies ever written, one of the established showpieces of every orchestra's repertoire, and a bulwark of Tchaikovsky's hold on the affections of the music public. It has been played until every shred of novelty is worn away, the seams show, and the dramatic surprises are gone. Every critic knows how right the composer was when he spoke of over-exaggeration, insincerity, fabrication—even the "something repellent". Nevertheless the Fifth Symphony is beloved wherever orchestras forgather the world over.

The work is another laboratory specimen of the composer's mature style—which means a mixture of his virtues and faults in unexplainable juxtaposition. It has lyric richness almost to excess; it has brilliance, variety of mood, tremendous passion. It has also the composer's characteristic melancholia, at times so deep that it can be sopped up; and there is much use of the throbbing rhythms which so befit his moods of desperate sadness. There is an orchestration of clarity, colour, and resounding power; and finally, like pieces of glass set in a diadem, there are some classic examples of bad taste.

The symphony makes a good beginning, as Tchaikovsky so often does in his first movements. This one may be a patchwork of themes instead of a logical piece of sonata construction, but has melodic interest, well sustained. The motto theme with which the work begins is radically different from the *Fatum* of the Fourth Symphony, being not a brassy fanfare but a soft, gloomily intoned melody for the clarinet. It runs through the whole symphony in various guises, becoming in the last movement the main declamation point of the entire work. Its use is so strongly stressed as to suggest some concrete idea behind the composer's inspiration. Tchaikovsky never admitted the existence of such a programme, as he did in the case of the Fourth Symphony, but many commentators have supplied their own. It seems doubtful if one really existed. This phase of Tchaikovsky's music is apt to be confusing. He was obviously impressed with the tone-poem, programme-symphony idea, which permeated the music of the romantic era. It ruled so much of his thinking that even his most abstract works often *sound* as if they had a programmatic basis. His melodies, helped by his dramatic type of construction, often *seem* to be telling some story; it is one of their strongest characteristics. But most of the time the composer was simply imitating the tone-poem style, not actually carrying it out. It is true that various poetic moods are strongly indicated in his scores, but his remarks on the "Manfred" Symphony prove that he was at his best and freest when he did not bind himself too strongly to them.

The second movement of the Fifth Symphony presents another celebrated Tchaikovsky melody. It is given at first to the solo horn and is later entwined with an obbligato by the oboe. The movement is remindful of a Chopin nocturne, extended and intensified with all the swelling passions and colours of the great orchestra. It misses being one of the supreme nocturnes, for its chief blemish is two convulsive interruptions by the motto theme which are noisy and tasteless. Chopin made use of such breaks in the mood of his later nocturnes, but he did it with a distinction of craftsmanship and idea which was denied Tchaikovsky.

The third movement is marked Waltz, and for this the composer has been doubly damned. The purists have said that a waltz has no place whatever in a symphony, and anyway this is not a real waltz at all. They may be right on both counts, but not many listeners would sacrifice this particular movement. It is unpretentious, melodious, and charming; and it serves to relieve the emotional tension of the surrounding movements.

It is hard to forgive Tchaikovsky for the last movement of the Fifth Symphony. Of all his lapses in taste and aesthetic judgment this blotch is very likely the worst. His purpose was to end his symphony with a resounding, triumphal finale; his method in part was to take the gloomy motto theme, turn it from minor to major, and proclaim it to the skies. It so happens that this is one of the hardest tests to which a composer may subject a theme—to have it sung fortissimo by the brass. Better themes than Tchaikovsky's have failed under this ordeal. Here the result is lamentable. The tune takes on neither dignity nor beauty, only the banal trumpery of an operatic march by Meyerbeer. The entire movement degenerates into an orgy of noise and triviality.

#### VIII

With the Fifth Symphony out of the way, Tchaikovsky went on another international tour, early in 1889. All over the Continent and in England he was received with acclaim, but he was homesick and depressed the entire time. During the next year he composed one of his most successful operas, *Pique Dame* (*The Queen of Spades*), which created a sensation at its première in St. Petersburg. Then in September 1890 the brooding and the vague morbid fears suddenly burst over him in the form of a horrible reality.

He had gone to Tiflis, in the Caucasus, to conduct a concert and to stay with his brother Anatole. There he received a letter from Mme von Meck. It informed him, in phrases that were strange and unfriendly, that the Meck fortune was in danger of collapse and that she could send him no more money. The composer was cut to the quick—not at all by any fears for his own security (for his music was at last bringing him an income) but by the tone of the letter, which was “tinged with inexplicable, ominous finality”. He hastened to write his friend a long reply, assuring her that he would never again have to fear privation and that her own misfortune was his only cause for worry. He reiterated, as he had done a thousand times, his undying gratitude and affection.

He never heard from her again. When he returned to Moscow a short time later he learned that her words were false: the Meck fortune was in no danger whatever.

Tchaikovsky was utterly crushed. In his bewilderment he grasped at every possible straw of explanation for his friend's action, but he found none. It

seemed that after all he had been no more than this wealthy woman's diversion, and that when the bond of money between them was dissolved she no longer had any interest in him. He was like a lover who had given his whole soul only to have it suddenly turned back as something unwanted, unworthy. He read her letters over and over, the burning words of adoration for his music and for him as an artist—and now after fourteen years it had all turned to ashes in his mouth. His pride received a hurt from which he never recovered.

The real reason for Mme von Meck's strange action is not known. Speculations have been various. It is possible that she may have learned in some way of the composer's abnormality, and was shocked. The authors of *Beloved Friend* believe that the answer is to be found in the lingering illness and death of her eldest son. In her grief she may have reproached herself, imagining that she had neglected him during the years when she lavished her interest and love upon the composer. These possibilities alone do not suffice to explain her cruel act, which she of all people knew would strike the hypersensitive man with terrible force. The answer seems rather to be a mental derangement. Mme von Meck had been ill for years with some form of tuberculosis; she also suffered from migraine, and from other nervous disorders, aggravated as the years went on by her inhibitions and her repressions. The loss of her son was like the snapping of a slowly tightening cord. And then, her mind deranged, she proceeded to kill the thing she loved most.

Tchaikovsky did not realize at once the finality of her action, but as the months went by without word or explanation he slipped slowly into an abyss of depression. The next spring he was persuaded to undertake a concert tour of America. On the night of May 5, 1891, he was the guest of honour at the ceremonies which marked the formal opening of Carnegie Hall, in New York City. The composer conducted one of his own works and received an ovation. In that same hall in the course of the next half century his music would receive the adulation of countless thousands of American music-lovers.

He went on to Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Niagara Falls. America fascinated and frightened him. He was amazed by the overwhelming hospitality, by the fact that he was more famous here than in Russia; he was impressed by the bath-tubs, the thirteen-storey buildings, the kindness of the Negro porters on the trains, the uninhibited expansiveness of Mr. Carnegie. Through it all homesickness and melancholia hung like a dead weight upon his mind. He would sit alone in his hotel room and weep.

Back in Russia he settled down during the summer of 1891 to work on an opera and a ballet which had been commissioned by the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg. The opera was *Iolanthe*, his last, and a failure. The ballet was one of his most treasured scores, the incomparable "Nutcracker". The suite which was drawn from this score has been deluged with performances for many years, so enormous has been its popularity.

Tchaikovsky had already written two ballets, "The Swan Lake" and "The Sleeping Beauty", both melodious though not consistent scores. The "Nutcracker" music is much superior and is one of the best pieces of musical fantasy in existence. In a flash Tchaikovsky revealed a lightness of touch, a feeling for decoration and a sense of humour that would hardly be suspected of the writer of the big, gloom-ridden symphonies. Let no one imagine that because music is "light" it is also easy. There is more melodic invention, more orchestral craftsmanship in these dainty miniatures than in many a symphonic movement. They are as charming and often as subtle as exquisitely made toys.

Like so many artists of greatness, Tchaikovsky never fully estimated his own prowess; or perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say that in his insistence upon expressing himself in the grand manner he underrated the simpler side of his art. There his genius flourished, without the overworked pretentiousness, the inequalities, the conscious struggling that marred so much of his effort in the larger forms. There his delightful melodic ideas with their lush harmonies and their splendid orchestral investiture were ideally suited to their medium. The composer seldom saw it that way. It would probably have amazed him to know that he left whole operas and tone poems which the world today would eagerly trade for another little piece as adorable as the "Flower Waltz".

## IX

The last two years of Tchaikovsky's life were an odyssey of utter despair. He went wandering around Europe much of the time, subjecting himself to public appearances, receiving as a kind of desperate diversion the honours which were heaped upon him. He wrote home of melancholia so deep that he wondered why he did not go mad. Without Mme von Meck to confide in the composer now wrote to a nephew, Bob Davydov, a young man for whom the description "weakling" would be charitable. He ended up years later a drug addict and a suicide in Tchaikovsky's house at Klin. This was the character to whom the composer had to turn after the vital intellect and the understanding heart of Mme von Meck had been closed to him.

In the autumn of 1892 the composer began work on a new symphony. Before it was finished he lost interest, decided that it was empty of inspiration, and destroyed the whole thing. Then late in the year on the way to Paris he began thinking about another symphony. "This time," he wrote, "a symphony with a programme, but a programme that will remain an enigma to all. Let them guess for themselves. . . . Often, while composing it in my mind during the journey, I shed tears." This was the genesis of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, in B minor, the composer's masterpiece, and one of the most celebrated works in symphonic literature. In February 1893, when he sat down to writing it, the notes flew from his pen. "In less than four days the first movement was done and all the rest clearly outlined in my head." He was buoyed up by the thought that his creative powers were still strong. There were interruptions later in the spring while he took time off to accommodate a publisher with some potboilers for the piano, and then to go to England to receive an honorary degree at Cambridge. (Saint-Saëns, Max Bruch, Boito, and Grieg were honoured on the same occasion.) By the end of August, after strenuous labour, the symphony was finished. There were no misgivings this time; Tchaikovsky knew what he had wrought. "I consider it the best of all my works to date. . . . I love it as I never loved any of my musical children."

He was destined never to know, however, just what the world thought of the work. When the Sixth Symphony was played for the first time, on October 28, 1893, at St. Petersburg, it was a failure. Only his own appearance as conductor saved the occasion from being a frost, and the critics were almost unanimous in declaring the Sixth inferior to his other symphonies. Ten days later, before he could hear another performance, Tchaikovsky was dead. He had drunk a glass of unboiled water; his brother Modest observed what he had done—too late. "Petia—what crazy folly! It's November and you're in Petersburg!" Within

a few hours the composer was in the agonies of cholera. He died on November 6, 1893.

Instantly the rumour spread that he had committed suicide. In all probability it was not true, but to those who knew his mental states the incredibly careless episode of the drinking-water seemed to have no other meaning. And then when the Sixth Symphony—sorrow-drenched and terrible—became known to the world, the evidence seemed overwhelming that Tchaikovsky had not only killed himself but that he had deliberately written his own requiem.

The true circumstances were far less romantic. The doctors who attended him were certain that the suspected water had little to do with his death and that he had been carrying the germs of cholera in his system for some time. The ugly rumour had at least one salutary effect. It focused attention upon the composer's last work, with the result that its initial failure was quickly forgotten in the wave of interest which awaited its performances all over the world. In a short time it became the most famous and frequently played symphony since Beethoven's Fifth.

To this day no one knows what enigmatic programme lies hidden under the notes of this score. Tchaikovsky had thought at first of calling it simply "A Programme Symphony", but on the morning after the first performance he seized the suggestion of Modest and called it "Pathetic". Beyond that now famous title we know nothing.

In form the work is totally unorthodox. The first movement is almost as long as two full movements, the second is cast in a curious waltzlike five-four rhythm, the third is a scherzo which winds up like a finale, while the slow movement is placed at the end of the work. Schumann's remark about Chopin's B flat minor Sonata might well apply here: the composer "bound together four of his maddest children". Similarly, what holds the four movements together is not a matter of technical device, or even of musical style; rather, it is a prevailing mood. The "Pathetic" Symphony is what its name indicates—an essay in pathos. Even the barbaric clamours of the third movement are an exultation that hides but does not obliterate a substratum of morbidity; it is a wild and desperate irony in the face of terrible grief.

If a prerequisite to great art is the artist's ability to mirror the spirit of his time and his surroundings, then Tchaikovsky at last fulfilled the requirements in his closing work. Heretofore his grieving and his sobbing had been all too personal; now at last he achieved a nobility of utterance which made his music the voice of a nation and the emotion of a whole people. The stupendous tragedy of old Russia is written down in these notes for all to read.

The first movement of the "Pathetic" Symphony has been called a "convulsion of the soul". It does not matter that the composer came not much closer than usual to the structure and the organic growth of the true sonata form. He makes up for lack of strict form with emotional force. The development, with its long pedal point of the tympani on a low F sharp, the tortured writhing of the strings above and the relentless downward tread of the trombones, is like a descent into the inferno—and one of the most gripping pages in romantic music. Tchaikovsky gave himself a huge span to fill in this long movement, but for once his melodic ideas have the breadth and the dignity to encompass it.

The second movement was long a novelty because of its unusual five-four rhythm. The graciousness, the felicity of the chief theme do not prevail. It is joined to a second theme poignant with repressed sorrow. The movement is

interesting despite repetitiousness. The third movement, *Allegro molto vivace*, begins like a conventional scherzo, but before long the racing, swirling figures have developed into headlong flight, likened to the sweep of Tartar hordes across the steppes. The furious energy, the Slavic violence of this music was hardly paralleled before Tchaikovsky's time.

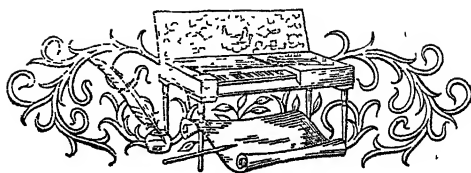
The stunning climax at the end of the third movement would have meant the end of any conventional symphony; but Tchaikovsky, displaying the artistic growth that is one of the attributes of genius, had come to understand the emptiness of that kind of ending for a symphony which began as this one did. When Wagner as an old man had thought of writing a symphony he remarked that "the finales are the awkward things; I will steer clear of them; I will keep to one-movement symphonies". Tchaikovsky had learned his lesson with the Fifth Symphony. He did not repeat his mistake in the Sixth. He rounded off this work with an *Adagio lamentoso*, an elegy which belongs with the noblest expressions of human grief. Huneker, who knew all the composer's failings, spoke of "this astounding torso, which Michael Angelo would have understood and Dante wept over"; and again, "a page torn from Ecclesiastes".

That the composer was contemplating death in this closing effort of his life is almost certain. He found it intolerable; he protested and struggled against it with all the creative strength he could summon. Bruised and tormented by life, he was yet terrified and revolted by this iniquitous end of all man's striving. It is "death alone that can suddenly make man to know himself", said Raleigh. Tchaikovsky proved those words in his poignant *Adagio*. He came suddenly to know himself—a great artist whose powers had come at last to their flood. He had time for this single effort in which, for once, his grasp did not exceed his reach. After that, there was left only the indisputable truth of Raleigh's words:

"O eloquent, just, and mightie Death! . . . Thou hast drawne together all the farre stretchèd greatnesse, all the pride, crueltie, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet!*"

# Debussy

1862-1918



THE HIATUS IN FRENCH MUSIC AFTER HECTOR BERLIOZ IS A PHENOMENON DIFFICULT to explain. Berlioz himself was a dynamo of original ideas and impulses; his work was of a type which would ordinarily vitalize hordes of imitators and produce schools and cults to follow the leads which he plainly pointed out. His influence among German composers was in fact enormous. Yet in France he was generally misunderstood and ignored. He has not a single contemporary worthy of standing beside him. For more than forty years after he wrote the "Fantastic" Symphony the most enduring contributions to French music were his own. After his best productive period had ended years passed before a talent as powerful as Bizet's appeared upon the scene. *Carmen* was finished in 1875—a masterpiece of musico-dramatics, melodic interest, colour, and style; but Bizet died three months after its first performance, at the age of thirty-seven. César Franck's great classic essays, which really signalled the regeneration of French music, began with the Quintet in 1879, at the very end of a long career. Meanwhile the men who held the stage—Auber, Halévy, Thomas, Gounod, Delibes—were a mixture of competence and mediocrity, artists whose horizon never extended beyond the Meyerbeerian triumphs at the Paris Opera.

It may be true that France as a social and political organism has been on the decline since the Napoleonic wars, but it would be dangerous reasoning to attribute to that national haemorrhage a period of sterility in the art of music. Wars produce strange and unpredictable effects upon the nations which lose them. The economy and the social life may be paralysed or destroyed, or it may be stimulated. The half century in France after 1815 was certainly one of political instability, but as far as the arts were concerned the country was nothing less than a hive of productivity. The French contribution to romantic literature was an accomplishment unsurpassed in any other country in Europe. No one has ever explained why, at this same period, the serious composers with the exception of Berlioz should have been pandering to a public taste for opera that was brazenly superficial, leaving works which now exemplify little more than degeneration, absurdity, or both.

At the high noon of the Second Empire the most popular composer in France was Jacques Offenbach, not a Frenchman but a Rhinelander, the son of a cantor of a Cologne synagogue. At least Offenbach's aims were as honest as his talent was prodigious. In the course of twenty-five years he wrote ninety

works for the French lyric stage. He did not concern himself with the pretensions of grand opera; nearly all of his pieces were light operas or operettas. Glittering, clever, frivolous, extravagantly empty, they were the musical epitaph of the whole gaudy Second Empire as it lurched towards its doom at Sedan. In 1859, after *Orpheus in the Underworld* had finished a record-breaking run, the Emperor himself took cognizance of a triumph of art and sent the composer a bronze bust, accompanied by a panegyric letter. Two years later in the same city occurred the historic fiasco of Wagner's *Tannhauser*.

There is no mystery about the after-effects of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Following that humiliating defeat the entire French nation underwent a catharsis. Revolt against the existing order was nowhere more strongly motivated than in the arts. In literature the lead passed to the realists, headed by Zola, Maupassant, and Daudet. Zola's theme was a gigantic scourging of the degenerate society whose diseased roots, trailing back to the Second Empire, had ruined France. From his naturalism grew a new literature all over Europe and America. In painting there arose the most famous art movement in modern times—impressionism. It was founded by Manet, Pissarro, Monet, Renoir, Sisley, Guillaumin, and Cézanne; and it indirectly sired Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Seurat. The movement began with Manet's struggles against the reactionary Salon painters, as early as 1859; but the First Impressionist Exhibition, which crystallized the idea, dated from 1874. In the next twenty-five years these men and their followers produced an art which is one of the permanent assets of French culture.

The first indication that new life was also flowing in the veins of French music came in the 1880s, with the belated discovery of the work of an obscure organist at the Church of Sainte Clothilde in Paris. This man was César Franck, a Belgian by birth, who had spent a lifetime in Paris as organist and teacher, eking out a few hours each day at composition. He was fifty-five before he began the works which were his masterpieces—the Quintet for Piano and Strings; the Symphonic Variations; the Violin Sonata; the Prelude, Chorale, and Fugue for piano; the String Quartet; and the Symphony in D minor.

Franck was the French Brahms. He was a romantic whose real predilection was the classic forms. The romantic side of his music is its outward style, which is rich and colourful, flooded with prismatic harmonies (chromatic modulation is his hallmark) and endowed with a deep expressiveness. It mirrors perfectly the mind of Franck the man. It is devoid of sensuousness; instead it burns with an ardour like that of religious ecstasy. Beneath this romantic exterior is a foundation of classicism. When Franck turned in the closing years of his life to forms like the sonata, the symphony, the string quartet, he had found at last the bridge between his two natures. His formal ancestor was Beethoven; his roots were the polyphony of Bach. Liszt once went to Sainte Clothilde to hear him in one of his celebrated feats of improvising, and the Abbé went away "evoking the name of J. S. Bach in inevitable comparison".

Franck left a group of pupils and disciples who were to carry on the work of regenerating French music—D'Indy, Duparc, Chausson, Lekeu, Pierné. The discovery by these young men of their master's superbly modern classicism gave them a new feeling of pride in their country's music and the belief that after all they would not be doomed to continual imitations of Gounod's *Faust*.

César Franck, important as he was, did not represent by any means the sum of new achievement in French music after 1870. The real genius and the movement he was to produce had yet to come. In the year 1887, when Franck was at



work on his Symphony in D minor, a young music student who had won the Prix de Rome returned to Paris, disgruntled and disillusioned, after several years at the Villa Medici. He was Claude Achille Debussy. In the next twenty years he would become the greatest composer that France has yet produced.

## II

Debussy's achievement was twofold—first as a musician of France, and second as a force of enormous potency in the history of music from the end of the nineteenth century down to the present time. Debussy freed his country from the influence of German music, and right at the time when the weight of Wagnerism lay heaviest upon every creative source. He gave France a music that was singularly its own—French in style, in mannerism, in spirit. For music in general he created singlehanded the school of impressionism; he gave it also a style, a technique, a spirit, and he endowed it with its finest works. Following the lead of Wagner, he made discoveries in the field of harmony that place him on a par with Wagner as inventor, explorer, and dauntless revolutionary. He was one of the supreme stylists in music as he was one of the most original thinkers ever to practise this art.

Debussy's personal life was one of only moderate interest. It was largely circumscribed by the city of Paris. He was born (August 22, 1862) in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, half an hour from Paris, and he spent the greater part of his life in the city itself. He was the typical Parisian of those years when she was at her most magnificent; he had little interest in any other place, or in any country other than France.

Debussy's father was the owner of a small china shop. The "De" in their name was not an indication of noble ancestry; the family had come from a long line of labourers, farmers, and small merchants. There is no record of any of them being notably gifted in the arts, musical or otherwise. Debussy had no formal schooling. The family were poor and during his childhood he was taught by his mother and an aunt.

There seems to have been something exceptional about him even as a child. He had a way of attracting older people who discerned in him evidence of talent and intellect. They invariably wanted to help him. When he was seven his aunt persuaded a banker to pay for his first music lessons. A year later Mme Mauté de Fleurville, the mother-in-law of the poet Verlaine, became interested in him. This woman had been a pupil of Chopin years before. She taught Debussy the piano for three years, and through her he was able to enter the Paris Conservatory in 1873, when he was eleven. Some years later, when he was nineteen, Debussy was taken up by a wealthy family named Vasnier. Mme Vasnier was young, beautiful, and a singer of talent. Her husband, much older than she, was an architect. The Vasniers did for Debussy what the Breunings did for Beethoven. They took him into their home, guided him to an appreciation of literature and art, introduced him to the refinements of a culture which his own parents had never been able to give him. Debussy wrote some of his earliest music in their home, and he dedicated several of his songs to Mme Vasnier.

Just before he met the Vasniers he had been helped by still another person of wealth and culture. By a curious twist of fate it happened to be Mme von Meck, the friend and patron of Tchaikovsky. On one of her trips abroad she

had asked the authorities of the Paris Conservatory to suggest someone who could give music lessons to her children and play duets with her. The person chosen was eighteen-year-old Debussy. He joined the Mecks in Switzerland and travelled with them through Italy and Austria. Mme von Meck liked the young Frenchman so well that she employed him again. He went to Moscow and lived in her house during the summers of 1881 and '82. In her correspondence with Tchaikovsky, Mme von Meck made several references to her "little Bussy", to his charming manner, his talent, and the pleasure he gave her when they played duets of Tchaikovsky's music. The end of the second visit came abruptly. Debussy had the misfortune to fall in love with one of Mme von Meck's lovely daughters. When he proposed the girl's mother rejected him, tactfully but with firmness. He was taken weeping to the train for Paris, and out of the lives of the Mecks for ever.

The Russian interludes in Debussy's life became important in an indirect way. Years later his mature musical style showed certain influences that stemmed from the Russians, chiefly Mussorgsky. Precisely how much of this can be traced to the summers in Moscow is a matter which has long puzzled musicologists.

Debussy spent eleven years at the Conservatory. He was a perplexing student. His teachers admitted that he had unusual talent, but he seemed perversely bent on misusing it; some thought him lazy and careless. He quarrelled with his teachers about the orthodox rules of composition. He was particularly resentful of the old-fashioned laws of harmony. After his classes he would sit at a piano and amuse his fellow students with a display of strange chords and chordal progressions—bizarre effects which would have horrified his professors. Even as a youngster he was more interested in chords and all their various forms and usages than any other branch of musical technique.

When he was twenty-two Debussy won the highest scholarship award that the Conservatory had to offer—the Prix de Rome. The composition which he had submitted in the competition was a cantata, "*L'Enfant prodigue*" ["The Prodigal Son"]. The award consisted of a three-year period of study at the Villa Medici in Rome, with expenses paid by the government. This honour (and it was an important one in the music life of France) left Debussy completely cold. At the time he was deep in his attachment for the Vasniers, and he left Paris with reluctance.

He was miserable all through his stay in Rome. Already a stubborn individualist, he hated even the mild restraints of life at the Villa. He was bored by his fellow students and he found Rome dull. Instead of working at new compositions which he was expected to send back to Paris at regular intervals he spent much of his time reading, or studying the operas of Wagner. He played *Tristan* at the piano for hours at a time. Years later he wrote that he had been "a Wagnerian to the point of forgetting the most elementary principles of politeness".

It must have been evident to any discerning judge of character that this perverse and strong-willed young man was headed for one of two things in life: either he would be a dilettante who would dabble in music for a while and then give it up for something easier, or he would cut out for himself a career of surpassing interest and accomplishment. At any rate, he never finished the sojourn at Rome. He quit after the second year and returned to Paris.

## III

Debussy was slow in reaching artistic maturity. Because of the nature of the style at which he finally arrived, its originality, and its tenuous connections with the music of the past, he had to go through a long and difficult struggle. For five years after he left Italy and settled down to a career in Paris he created much that was interesting, but not a great deal that was first-rate. During that time, however, forces were at work, outside his purely musical interests, which were moulding his ideas and contributing to the shape and character of the mature artistry which finally emerged.

Paris itself contributed much. The city resembled the Paris of Chopin's time—a roosting-place for many brilliant birds of the arts. In the early 1880s the life that had formerly centred in the Latin Quarter moved to Montmartre. In that section arose a new pleasure ground of cafés, bars, cabarets, and restaurants. For brilliance, gaiety, and variety, for all the ramifications of amusement that began with intellectual stimulation of the most serious sort and ended with every conceivable kind of vice, Montmartre has probably never been duplicated in the history of Paris. The historian of that epoch was not a writer but a painter—Toulouse-Lautrec, a hideously ugly little man with the legs of a dwarf and the face of a monster. Descendant of one of the oldest and most aristocratic families of France, Lautrec spent fifteen years in Montmartre, turning out with furious energy a torrent of drawings, paintings, lithographs, and posters that recorded everything he saw—everything from the art of great entertainers like Aristide Bruant and Yvette Guilbert to intimate scenes in the lowest brothels—until he died at thirty-seven, burned up by alcohol and sexual excess.

Debussy, a true Parisian, loved the stimulation of the Montmartre night life. In the eighties and nineties he frequented various cafés and brasseries, among them the Café Weber, a favourite haunt of Lautrec's, of Marcel Proust, and Oscar Wilde. In such places he met the artists, writers, painters, and musicians who were interested as he was in new ideas in the arts. In 1891 he met Erik Satie, who was then working as a pianist in a Montmartre café. They remained close friends for many years, and the association had an important bearing on Debussy's music. Satie, who did not begin serious study of composition until he was forty, was for a long time dismissed as an arch-dilettante, a poseur, and even a clown, largely because he dared to apply to music a sense of humour. Today he is admired by many critics as one of the cleverest innovators of his time.

In the 1880s two major movements were agitating the intellectuals—impressionism in painting and symbolism in poetry. Both were throwing up clouds of controversial dust. The impressionist movement was by far the more important of the two, and by that time the painters had actually won their great victory. Debussy was powerfully drawn to the theories of these men, their experiments in colour, their attempts to record less of photographic representation and more of atmosphere and evocation; above all he admired their courageous fight against reaction. However, even though Debussy's own work later took on the name "impressionism", it was actually from the symbolists that he derived most of the technical ideas which he applied to music.

Two great French poets had paved the way for symbolism. The first was Baudelaire, who was a passionate admirer of Poe, and who introduced to French literature the American's ideas of romantic grotesqueness, of horror, and morbid

introspection. The second was Verlaine. This man, one of the prime enigmas of human character, lived in filth, saturated with absinthe and debauched by sexual indulgence. He mixed in his art a disgusting lewdness and some of the most exquisite, subtly formed, and tenderly expressed verses ever written. Verlaine died in 1896, after having bequeathed a new style to French poetry, one which broke down the rigid laws of metre and imitated instead the cadences of music. From this starting point the symbolists went on to a style which also tried to destroy the tyranny of the direct statement; they sought instead to evoke thought and description, to suggest, to hint, to symbolize, and thus build up an impression of a thing rather than describe the thing itself.

The acknowledged leader of the symbolists was Stéphane Mallarmé, whose verses were called "the most unintelligible ever written in French". Debussy met Mallarmé in 1887, and he began attending the "Tuesdays" at which the symbolist poets and their followers forgathered. Among those whom he met were Henri de Régnier, André Gide, and Pierre Louys. The author of *Aphrodite* (called the "high priest of nudity . . . in art, literature, and the stage") became one of Debussy's closest friends. He was a lover of music and painting, and a gifted amateur photographer. He knew much more about art and literature than the composer did and the latter seems to have learned much from him.

The kind of a man Debussy was and the outlines of his character begin to emerge from accounts of him at this time. Like Chopin and Wagner, he was a sybarite, but of a different order than either of his predecessors. His love of the exquisite and the pleasurable was much deeper and subtler than Wagner's; it was less feminine than Chopin's. Many of his tastes were those of the out-and-out sensualist, others were closely connected with his intellect. He was drawn to art that was rare and exotic; he loved fine engravings and beautifully made books; Japanese prints were a source of special delight. As might be expected, he was a gourmet. His appetite for caviare was notorious.

From personal descriptions the picture of an individualist is marked. When he appeared in the cafés he was usually wearing a cape and his favourite hat—the broad-brimmed Stetson of the American "Wild West". But there was nothing Western about his features. His black eyes and hair, pale face, and pointed beard reminded a contemporary writer of a nobleman painted by Titian. In England it was noted that he resembled Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His most salient feature was an enormous forehead, bulging, it was said, like the prow of a ship. Henri de Régnier wrote: "I can still see that flabby, indolent figure, the dull pallor of his face, the keen, black, heavy-lidded eyes, the huge forehead with its curious bumps, over which he wore a long wisp of fuzzy hair; there was something feline and at the same time gypsylike about him, something passionate yet self-centred."

Debussy was indeed self-centred to a high degree. It was the keynote of his whole character. It made him appear sensitive, unsociable, even timid, but flashes of irony in his speech and at times a calculated sarcasm showed the real man beneath. He went through life and through art choosing exactly whom and what he wanted. The rest he thrust away. Many of the men to whom he was drawn and whose art he admired—Verlaine, Huysmans, Louys, Satie—were abnormal in one way or another; some were definitely decadent. With the taste of an eclectic, Debussy extracted from them only what he needed. That is the reason for the remarkable health of his own music. It is never morbid, never overpessimistic. Its vague outlines, its impalpability, its marvellous evocation of misty, dreamlike states were never the product of a febrile,

uncertain, or decadent mind. Rather, it was a mind of unfailing sharpness and certitude, which was capable of grappling with some of the most difficult problems in art and of solving many of them.

The way he handled the Wagner problem is an indication of the clarity of his perceptions and his mental strength. In the 1880s half the intellectuals of France were intoxicated and overwhelmed by Wagner's music. A generation of composers let their enthusiasm run away with them, ruining their own talents in fruitless imitation. Some of them even made public fools of themselves by weeping and fainting conspicuously at the Bayreuth festivals. The writers were even more rabid, especially the symbolists, who wrote verses in praise of Wagner and tried to link up their aesthetic theories with his. In 1888, when he was twenty-six years old, Debussy went to Bayreuth and heard performances of *Parsifal* and *Die Meistersinger*; the next year he went again and heard *Tristan*. When he came back from the second pilgrimage he had changed from one of the wildest of Wagnerian zealots to a sceptic and a dissenter.

It was not so much that Debussy was disillusioned about Wagner's music, for he always thereafter admitted much of its greatness. What he perceived, as did few artists of his own generation, was its destructive force upon new talent like his own. Thereafter he set his teeth against "old Klingsor". He took what he wanted of Wagner's discoveries and innovations and then deliberately set out upon a course of action totally at variance with the German's. For a man not yet thirty to attempt thus to swim against such a tide required courage of a high order.

#### IV

In 1892, Debussy read Maeterlinck's drama, *Pelléas and Mélisande*. He was so impressed that he decided to make it into an opera. The idea and its execution occupied him for the next ten years, until 1902, when the work was finally finished and produced in Paris.

*Pelléas* is like a great pivot in the career of Debussy. It was his largest and most important work. It was also a laboratory and a testing ground for many of his impressionistic ideas in music. He made several versions of the opera, constantly revising and improving it. This long and difficult task did not by any means exhaust his creative energies. At the same time he was composing other important works—his String Quartet, "L'Après-midi d'un faune", and the Nocturnes for orchestra, and a group of notable songs and piano pieces. Public performances of these works revealed to the world the new art of Debussy, a style far in advance of his earlier pieces, and they prepared the way for *Pelléas* itself.

The opera was first performed at the Opéra-Comique on April 30, 1902, with Mary Garden, then comparatively unknown, in the role of Mélisande. The result was a long and heated public argument. The story of the work and its musical style were so diametrically opposed to the trend of romantic opera and in particular to the grandiose conceptions of Wagner that it was bound to impress many on first hearing as fragmentary and thin. The world of French music was sharply divided, and the range of critical comment was wide. Fortunately, for every critic who imagined that the composer was destroying art in his attempts to be different, or who thought that he was playing some gigantic hoax, there were others who discerned in the score a fabric of unparalleled richness and originality.

The composer himself remained aloof. He had definitely arrived as a composer, but as the public interest in him and his works grew in leaps and bounds, he became more of a recluse than ever. Debussy was the antithesis of Wagner, who spread his love affairs, his money troubles, and every other personal detail of his life over a vast correspondence for all to see. Debussy had a horror of self-revelation. His French biographers have also been reticent about exposing details of his life while many persons who might be affected are still alive. As a result there are years in which very little is known about him—for example, the five years after the Prix de Rome episode, when he had abandoned the Vasniers and was beginning to take up with the symbolists. It is known that he made a living chiefly by giving music lessons and by doing hack work for music publishers, but there are hints that friends like Pierre Louÿs occasionally had to come to his financial rescue.

During those early uncertain years he had a mistress, in the usual manner of the Montmartre habitués. She was named Gaby, and she had green eyes. They lived together during most of the ten-year task of *Pelléas*. Then Gaby with the green eyes was discarded (apparently after hurtful scenes) for a young dressmaker, Rosalie (or Lily) Texier. In 1899 the composer and Lily were married. From the meagre accounts of their relationship it appears that Lily was a simple, unaffected person, with very little to stimulate the composer mentally after his early infatuation had worn away. The end of their marriage was a near-tragedy. Debussy became enamoured of Mme Emma Bardac, the wife of a wealthy banker. In 1904, after a long struggle with his conscience, the composer deserted his wife for Mme Bardac. Lily tried to kill herself. She was taken to a hospital with a bullet-wound near her heart.

The scandal which followed created a crisis in Debussy's career. He was widely denounced for what appeared to be the most callous behaviour. It seemed that Mme Bardac was everything that Lily was not—a woman of unusual personal charm and a talented singer; she enjoyed a background of culture and social grace. Most damning of all, it appeared that she was wealthy. For a time the composer was ostracized by many of his friends, who believed that he had deliberately sold himself through marriage for the security and luxury he had always craved. In 1905, after a double divorce, Debussy married Mme Bardac. A daughter, called Chou-Chou, was born. She was the composer's only child and his devotion to her was fanatical.

At this time Debussy was in his early forties, and his art had reached maturity in a magnificent and prolonged flowering. During the decade after *Pelléas* he produced a long series of works which were masterpieces and which climaxed the entire impressionistic style which he had invented. Among them were the two orchestral canvases, "La Mer" and "Ibéria"; and for the piano, "Estampes", "L'Île joyeuse", two series of Images, the "Children's Corner" and two groups of Preludes.

Practically all of these works were controversial. In France the centre of opposition to Debussy clustered around Vincent D'Indy, the disciple of Cesar Franck, who like his master was a romantic with a reverence for the classic forms. For once, however, it was not the opponents but the protagonists of the revolutionary artist who made the most noise. The Debussyites were so voluble and often so wrongheaded in propounding theories in favour of their idol that the composer himself more than once prayed for deliverance from his friends. Debussy was thus one musician who could never complain that his most radical ideas ever failed of appreciation during his lifetime.

Shortly before his fiftieth year there appeared the first traces of the disease which was to ruin Debussy's art and finally end his life. He became afflicted with a cancer. For nine years he struggled against it, trying to hide it from his friends and suffering its agonies in silence. His work not only thinned out in volume but it finally underwent a decline almost as hopeless as Schumann's last efforts. Composition had always been difficult for Debussy; he was naturally indolent and he hated to be hurried. Now he could rouse himself to the strain of creative work only after killing effort. It is only to be expected that his last music is for the most part pale with lack of inspiration, repetitious, formulaized, sterile.

To the disease was added worry about his financial security. Contrary to general belief, his wife did not have unlimited wealth, and at various times the composer had to raise money by writing critical articles for the French press. He undertook several tours of England, Italy, Germany, and Russia, during which he appeared as conductor of his own works. There is also clear indication that some of the last music that he composed was turned out more for reason of publication fees than for any inspirational urge from the music itself.

The catastrophe of August 1914 almost killed Debussy, but he hung on to life, confidant of the ultimate triumph of France. He did not live to see the deceptive dawn of November 1918. On a day in the previous spring, the twenty-fifth of March, this man who had devoted his life to the creation of exquisite sound had to die while the shells of Big Bertha were making their hideous din, tearing through the vitals of Paris.

He was buried in the cemetery at Passy.

## V

Even the most cursory examination of Debussy's music reveals the clue to the main ideas which ruled his thinking and his purposes. He was in revolt against bigness. Specifically he was trying to get away from the overwhelming amplitude which German music had achieved in the late nineteenth century and which, it is now evident, had been one of the chief causes of its decline. The heroic spirit, the impressiveness of sheer size of the Beethoven symphonies (especially the Ninth) were a legacy which became both the glory and the curse of German music. When Wagner followed with his gigantic music dramas there was no turning back. The attempt to outbuild Beethoven and to outblow Wagner became the chief preoccupation of Germany's composers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it stultified some of her best creative minds.

Anton Bruckner's symphonies, written in the three decades after 1866, are among the earlier manifestations of this disease. Nearly all of them are windy with unfilled spaces—areas which the composer's limited inspiration simply could not encompass. What they needed more than anything else was what Brahms would have given them had they been his—ruthless cutting and compression.

Gustav Mahler, a greater composer than Bruckner, tried even harder to achieve the Teutonic ideal of the colossal. In his Second Symphony he was already trying to outdo Beethoven's Ninth, with a series of Promethean soul struggles, apocalyptic visions, funeral marches of epic proportions, and a final world resurrection—all projected by an enormous orchestra and a forest of

voices. By the time he had reached his Eighth Symphony (called "The Symphony of a Thousand" because it requires that many performers) this form of megalomania had achieved its limit, and Mahler was a broken and hopelessly frustrated man. The pessimism which overtook him at the end of his life has all the earmarks of a neurosis, brought on by the realization that he had been struggling for years for an impossible ideal. It is significant that Mahler's masterpiece, and one of the finest works in twentieth-century music, is his "Lied von der Erde" ["Song of the Earth"], which is scored for a modest orchestra and two voices, and which pays no homage whatever to size or impressiveness. In this restrained and deeply felt work (as in the composer's songs) Mahler's essential genius is revealed.

Complexity had been another pitfall for modern German composers, and it had stemmed in the main from the polyphonic richness of Wagner's later scores. Richard Strauss went a step further. His tone poems displayed a positive wizardry in the contrapuntal handling of melodic lines, outlined by a masterful use of orchestral colour. The limits of this type of music were reached by Arnold Schönberg, when he was in the early stages of his career and still a Wagner worshipper. Schönberg paid his respects to size with his "Gurre-Lieder", a huge, overripe piece of Wagnerian romanticism; before that he had written his symphonic poem, "Pelleas und Melisande", which is a matted jungle of contrapuntal lines. As many as a dozen themes sound together, producing a tonal labyrinth which no amount of orchestral craftsmanship could clarify.

What Claude Debussy undertook to do was something which most Germans of his time would have been disqualified by nature to attempt. Congenitally impressed by size and anything complex, they would not stop until they had brought the whole art of German music to a dead end. Debussy, on the other hand, realized as a young man in his twenties what he had to accomplish to bring about his own salvation and that of all modern music. First he had to abandon the chase after the colossal and return to smaller things. He had to forgo the Faustian soul struggles and the strivings after universality and instead limit himself to more intimate and subtle ideas. He had to scale down almost every phase of musical art and technique to more reasonable proportions. Fortunately he was a Frenchman who could inherit those characteristics of French genius which were needed most—the urge towards simplification, reason, and restraint.

Debussy also had many technical ideas which ran counter to the prevailing fashion. He was tired of the formulas which the Germans and the Italians had been using for centuries for their basic designs. He wanted to change the time-honoured methods of creating and developing themes from their very embryos. Wagner and Liszt had broken down many of the old restrictions, but Debussy wanted to go much farther. He wanted to devise wholly new musical patterns which would have little or no connection with those already in use.

He also had an unusual interest in rhythm. Here was another case where the influence of Wagner had been pernicious. The huge, slow-moving music dramas, with long stretches almost devoid of rhythmic pulse, were like mastodons with slow heart-beats. Due to the demands of his dramatic material and his facility as a harmonist, Wagner had neglected the rhythmic aspect of his music. Many of the Germans followed him slavishly, ignoring the splendid rhythmic inventions of Schumann and Brahms. Debussy sensed that rhythm could be revived and developed just as harmony had been, until it attained once again its rightful place in the general musical scheme.



The most revolutionary of all Debussy's ideas had to do with harmony. Even as a boy at the Conservatory he had begun thinking of chords as entities in themselves, with the same fundamental importance as melodies. Long before he was able to use them in his music he had mentally catalogued an enormous vocabulary of chords of every description. Some of them he derived from Wagner, some had long been in use but were regarded by composers merely as by-products. When Debussy began using this choral vocabulary in his mature works it was not according to the old rules and formulas. He devised an entirely new way of handling them and of creating musical fabrics in which the centre of interest would be focused upon them. In so doing he proved himself one of the most original and daring inventors in music history.

## VI

Debussy's work divides itself into three fairly definite periods. The first is the music of his student years and the time before he started work on *Pelléas*; the second begins with his start on *Pelléas* in his thirtieth year, and extends for almost two decades; the third is the last half-dozen years of his life when his inspiration slowly expired.

Except for a remarkable group of songs, the compositions of the first period do not yield a very rich harvest. The largest works are the two cantatas—"L'Enfant prodigue", which won Debussy the Prix de Rome, and "La Demoiselle élue" ["The Blessed Damosel"], which indicated the young composer's interest in the Pre-Raphaelite movement. The piano works include the two "Arabesques", "Reverie" (recently made into an American popular song), "Ballade", "Danse", and "Valse Romantique". Most of this music can be described as lyrical, gracefully delicate and well made, but lacking the impress of real genius. The cantatas are good considering their composer's youth, but they would hardly live today had he not later achieved greatness. Debussy's musical ideas at this time were a mixture of Wagner and Massenet. The composer of *Thaïs* and *Manon* had fallen heir to the throne of French opera by producing a series of the most successful works in its recent history. He was also a professor of advanced composition at the Conservatory. Inevitably, a student like Debussy could not escape the idiosyncrasies of his style—its lyric sweetness and sentimentality, liberally flavoured with sensuousness.

Debussy's early piano music betrays the same insecurity of style and purpose. It is curiously lacking in new ideas, being full of conventional figures and effects, with only occasional flashes of harmonic surprise. Even these are often awkwardly introduced. There are some piquant rhythmic and melodic touches (especially in the "Second Arabesque" and the "Danse") but little that could be called first-rate.

The songs, however, must be segregated from these criticisms of Debussy's early work. This was the one department of his achievement in which he displayed his genius practically in adolescence. He became the most individual and the most widely imitated of all writers of French songs, by creating a style that was uniquely fitted to the spirit of French verse. Some of his finest songs date from the uncertain period just after his failure at the Villa Medici; a few even belong to the years with the Vasniers. It is clear that here he was tapping the real sources of his genius, and that in the piano pieces and the cantatas he was shooting wide of the mark.

His early song style is delicate, restrained, fastidious. With unerring instinct he went to poets like Verlaine, Paul Bourget, and Baudelaire, whose verses gave him rare word pictures, or new variations on the old themes of love and nature. The modernity of Debussy's style even in the earliest songs is astonishing. He was already avoiding many of the old clichés of the song forms—the rounded phrases and the stock repetitions—and was hearkening instead to the words. Moreover, he had already begun his most characteristic procedure of compressing his ideas down to a few essential notes. He culled away everything that was unnecessary, leaving sometimes only a half phrase, a fragment of melody, an isolated harmonic progression, a distinctive rhythmic effect that is the inspirational core. This core might be repeated many times and with subtle alterations, but each time the listener is left free to fill in with his own imagination the unspoken musical thought.

Debussy's new harmonic language, which later became his trademark, is more than hinted at in these songs. There are bold juxtapositions of keys, complex chord formations, extensive use of dissonance, and often a complete overshadowing of the melodic material by the chordal pattern. The accompaniments are models both of richness and restraint, often delicately suggestive of orchestral tints. Even the endings of many of the songs indicate the boldness of the young composer's ideas. The task of rounding off a musical work is a difficult one, and before Chopin (who produced a fund of new ideas to close his works) this was one of the most neglected of all phases of music. It was only natural that Debussy, with his hatred of the hackneyed and the stencilled, should start early in his career experimenting with cadences in an attempt to relieve their monotony.

In 1893 Debussy wrote a String Quartet, a work which is unique for a number of reasons. It is his first large-scale masterpiece, and one of the best pieces of chamber music after Brahms. Unfortunately, it remains an isolated phenomenon in the composer's catalogue. So studiously did he avoid the old abstract forms throughout his career that, besides this quartet, only three sonatas for various instruments and two works for clarinet and piano, written towards the close of his life, can be classed as chamber works.

Debussy's String Quartet bears certain outward resemblances to the traditional forms. It is in the usual four movements, and it is bound together by a cyclic plan, i.e. most of the melodic material is drawn from a single theme. Otherwise it has little in common with the conventional quartet style, either in orthodox construction or thematic development. Instead it appears as a series of cleverly contrived studies in string tone. The four instruments produce a wide-variety of effects, many of which had never before been heard in quartet works.

The first and last movements are full of splendid energy and rhythmic vitality, at times suggesting the broad-gauge power of the full string choir. The harmonies are often unusual, but without being daringly "modern". The second movement is one of the most charming scherzos in quartet literature. It is a faery piece, filled with the tiny gleamings and sparklings of pizzicatos, the rush of dainty little rhythmic and melodic figures. The third movement is a kind of nocturne. The tonal landscape is pale with silver moonlight; there are soft murmurings of muted strings, and a melody that is "like a whispered promise of mysterious delight". This was Debussy's last gesture towards nineteenth-century romanticism. In his next work he would begin a new phase in his art and a new epoch in the development of music.

The Prelude to "L'Après-midi d'un faune" ["The Afternoon of a Faun"] remains the most famous of all Debussy's works, as it is certainly one of the most perfect impressionistic works ever written for orchestra. It was composed between the years 1892-94, at a time when the composer's admiration for the symbolist poets was at its height. The eclogue which forms its background was written by Mallarmé in 1876 and had become the outstanding example of symbolist vagueness and obscurity—a "famous miracle of unintelligibility". Various translations of the piece have been attempted and most of them have failed, for the reason that Mallarmé's style defies exact translation. Only Edmund Gosse seems to have been able to convey a full measure of Mallarmé's dream picture, in a paraphrase that is both a matchless piece of English prose and an indispensable companion to Debussy's music:

A faun—a simple, sensuous, passionate being—wakens in the forest at daybreak and tries to recall his experience of the previous afternoon. Was he the fortunate recipient of an actual visit from nymphs, white and golden goddesses, divinely tender and indulgent? Or is the memory he seems to retain nothing but the shadow of a vision, no more substantial than the "arid rain" of notes from his own flute? He cannot tell. Yet surely there was, surely there is, an animal whiteness among the brown reeds of the lake that shines out yonder. Were they, are they, swans? No! But Naiads plunging? Perhaps! Vaguer and vaguer grows the impression of this delicious experience. He would resign his woodland godship to retain it. A garden of lilies, golden-headed, white-stalked, behind the trellis of red roses? Ah! the effort is too great for his poor brain. Perhaps if he selects one lily from the garth of lilies, one benign and beneficent yielder of her cup to thirsty lips, the memory, the ever-receding memory, may be forced back. So when he has glugged upon a bunch of grapes, he is wont to toss the empty skins into the air and blow them out in a visionary greediness. But no, the delicious hour grows vaguer; experience or dream, he will never know which it was. The sun is warm, the grasses yielding; and he curls himself up again after worshipping the efficacious star of wine, that he may pursue the dubious ecstasy into the more hopeful boskages of sleep.

Debussy's music begins with the voice of a solo flute, "singing" (wrote Lawrence Gilman) "a drowsily voluptuous phrase that falls and rises indolently between C sharp and G natural, as if undecided whether to stay in the key of E or wander into C major". With that lovely melody—exotic, melting, unforgettable—the first notes of a new impressionism are sounded, and music has bridged a gap to a wholly new territory of the imagination. In all the history of this art nothing quite like it had been heard before.

First to be noted about this piece is its essentially non-Germanic style. By a bold departure from convention in all three departments—melody, harmony, and rhythm—Debussy creates a new style that henceforth will be the sign of a typically Gallic art. The tissue of this music is the antithesis of German solidity and forthrightness. It turns instead to vagueness and impalpability, to softness and to understatement; to subtle delicacies of sonority and the beauty of tone-colouring for its own sake. An indeterminate key feeling in the opening bars continues throughout the work. It is hard to predict the exact tonality at any given moment; some chords move from one to another with very little formal preparation; what used to be called unrelated chords follow each other at will. Liberal use of the whole-tone scale helps to break up the bounds of tonality; dissonance is frequent, and (in Léon Vallas' phrase) "the enveloping of the real notes of a chord in notes alien to it".

With this new harmonic freedom melody is correspondingly unfettered. The chief theme of the flute, with its chromaticism and its strong suggestion of



*[Brown Brothers]*

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Painting by Marcel Baschet. (Rome, 1884)



[Rischgitz Studios

GIACOMO PUCCINI

the interval of an augmented fourth, is typical of the new type of melody which Debussy has invented. The innumerable changes of time signature also indicate a new phase of modernity—a fluctuation of rhythm almost at will.

It would be difficult to overpraise Debussy's use of the orchestra for this work. Except for two antique cymbals (which add "gleams of silver light" at the close) the instrumentation is remarkable for its modesty—a fair-sized woodwind choir, four horns, two harps, and strings. Solo flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, and violin are given some of the rarest melodic flights in modern music, while the harp is used with a new understanding of its exotic tonal colouring. These ingredients, with a polyphonic structure that is Wagnerian in its density and richness, bring about an entirely new colour series to the orchestral palette.

After half a century "*L'Après-midi d'un faune*" retains its essential beauty. It has been imitated times without number, but never equalled. Debussy himself never returned to this particular phase of his art; hating repetition, he passed on to still further refinements and excursions. The "*Faun*" stands alone, unmatched in music for sheer voluptuousness of sound.

## VII

Debussy's next major work took the form of three Nocturnes for orchestra, completed in 1899. These were titled "*Nuages*" ["Clouds"], "*Fêtes*" ["Festivals"], and "*Sirènes*" ["Sirens"]. The third Nocturne requires a small chorus of women's voices in addition to the orchestra. The composer's original plan was to write a triptych for solo violin and orchestra, and he had in mind the famous Belgian violinist, Eugène Ysaÿe, as his first interpreter. Over a period of several years the general scheme of these pieces underwent various changes, until the solo violin idea was abandoned altogether. Soon after their publication the first two Nocturnes became standard works in symphonic repertoires all over the world. The third, however, is seldom performed today and is in fact inferior to its companions.

On the occasion of their first performance Debussy provided short descriptions of his pieces in which he said that "the title 'Nocturnes' is to be understood in a wider sense than that usually given it, and should be regarded as conveying a decorative meaning". For "*Nuages*" he had in mind "the unchanging aspect of the sky, with the slow melancholy passage of clouds dissolving in a grey vagueness tinged with white". There have been many successful landscapes in tone, many evocations of Nature; but this small orchestral canvas remains unexcelled. It is the quintessence of Debussy's mature style and technique. A model of economy and restraint, it never speaks boldly; rather it insinuates, in a vague dreaminess and with infinite subtlety. The technical process is one of distillation. The composer strains away everything unnecessary, whether it be melody or accompaniment, until only the sparest figures are left.

The mood and style are announced in the opening measures by two clarinets and two bassoons, in a progression of parallel fifths and thirds that must have convinced the Hanslicks of the time that a madman was at work. (This figure, by the way, may indicate one of Debussy's debts to Mussorgsky, for in the latter's song "*Retrospect*", in the "*Without Sunlight*" cycle, there appears a similar figure in the accompaniment.) A moment later the English horn sings a phrase of singular mournfulness. It never develops; instead it reappears at various times, delicately poised against a shifting background. There is little of orthodox

development of themes; this is replaced by repetition of a few basic ideas. The pace is unvaryingly slow, like the grave convolutions of clouds themselves; their drifting formlessness is indicated by bold progressions of unrelated ninth chords ("gliding chords", one musicologist has called this Debussy invention). The pentatonic scale lends it exotic melancholia; there are many suggestions of the open tritone, for its empty, keyless effect, its "vague greyness".

Far from lacking emotion, "Nuages" is one of the most affecting pieces Debussy ever wrote. It evokes those nameless, unspoken thoughts which clouds themselves evoke. There are many touches of emotional significance—brought about by a sudden change of a chord from minor to major, an alteration of some expected harmony, or a line of counterpoint (like that of the viola at the reappearance of the first theme) which accentuates the prevailing sadness.

In "Fêtes" the composer imagined "the restless, dancing rhythms of the atmosphere, interspersed with abrupt scintillations. There is also an incidental procession—a wholly visionary pageant—passing through and blending with the argente revelry; but the background of uninterrupted festival persists; luminous dust particles in the universal rhythm." In his descriptive notes as well as in his music, it might be observed, Debussy was using something of the symbolist-impressionist technique.

"Fêtes" is a crowded, phantasmagoric canvas of brilliant effect; at the same time it is light as air, impalpable and visionary as the dream stuff of the mind. An exotic rhythmic structure, complex and wayward, animates the whole work. The melodies fly past like themes blown along the wind; at the close they are like tunes heard at a distance in the hot languor of the summer night—vague, unfinished, vanishing into air at the touch. The pageant which interrupts this "argente revelry" is one of those breathless moments of sheer effect which has no equal in impressionistic music: distant trumpets and throbbing harps announce the coming of some new cavalcade of maskers; within the space of a few bars the orchestral scene is suddenly ablaze with magic light and colour—and then in an instant they have all vanished, their themes calling back from afar as the whole scene fades away.

It is easy to see how the term "impressionism", which was in the forefront of controversy in the art world at that time, came to be applied to the new music of Debussy. Works like these Nocturnes are perfect examples of the power of suggestion which is the basis of the impressionistic idea. There is no attempt at graphic representation, no direct imitation of the sights or sounds of Nature. There are only vague hints, purposeful elisions and dislocations, a studied diffuseness, which, given merely the word of the title to start the imagination, evoke in the listener's mind a train of images. In many of Debussy's finest impressionistic works, such as these, the listener often brings as much to his aesthetic enjoyment as he receives.

### VIII

Debussy was fortunate in hitting upon Maeterlinck's drama, *Pelléas and Mélisande*, as the subject for an opera. The composer had an acute sense of theatrical values, but he was limited in the selection of a story by the peculiarities of his own musical style. His difficulties are indicated in the fact that *Pelléas* is his single completed opera. He tried hard to find other subjects. There were at least five different story ideas (including Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and



Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*) which he entertained at various stages of his career, but which were abandoned before any real progress was made.

There was no question about *Pelléas and Mélisande*. Debussy seems to have realized at once that it would be an ideal vehicle for his own ideas, and when he set about building his libretto he had to make comparatively few changes in Maeterlinck's original drama. The story itself is a variant of the Paolo and Francesca theme. Golaud and Pelléas are half-brothers, grandsons of Arkel, the old King of Allemonde. Golaud, middle-aged and stern (a counterpart of the modern Soames Forsyte), finds Mélisande lost and weeping beside a spring in a strange forest. Her golden crown has fallen into the spring. She is a princess, but she will tell Golaud nothing of whence she came or why. Months later Golaud returns to the ancient castle of his grandfather, bringing Mélisande with him as his wife. There she meets Pelléas. The main part of the drama is concerned with the growing love between Pelléas and Mélisande and the torturing jealousy suffered by Golaud. The older brother finally kills Pelléas when he finds Mélisande in his arms. In the closing scene Mélisande herself is dying, after having given birth to a child. In an agony of remorse and doubt Golaud questions her about Pelléas. She admits that she loved him, but innocently.

Debussy was attracted to this story for its unusual emotional quality and also because Maeterlinck clothed it in an atmosphere of vague, elusive beauty. There is a spell of medieval mystery over the old castle, with its ancient towers and trees that shut out the sunlight, its caves and grottoes, its vistas of the near-by sea. In this setting the drama that unfolds is part real, part imaginary. The characters live in half-shadows, their thoughts and actions repressed and indeterminate. Mélisande herself is a child of mystery, the embodiment of a fragile and disturbing beauty. The love between her and Pelléas remains unspoken throughout the drama until the very moment of his death. The old king, Arkel, is a compassionate witness to this human suffering, which he is powerless to prevent or assuage. The tragedy ends with an unresolved doubt in the tortured mind of Golaud.

The opera which Debussy fashioned from this story is both a revolution in musical style and a landmark in the history of the lyric stage. It is the first (and in some respects the only) perfect example of the union of drama and music for which opera revolutionists from Gluck to Wagner had been striving. Debussy's debt to Wagner in this score is great. *Pelléas* could never have come into existence had not Wagner already freed opera from the dynasty which had made everything subservient to the voice—freed it by stripping it of aria, recitative, ensemble singing, and every other purely vocal advantage. Wagner ended up by centring the interest in his work not in the drama, as was his intention, but in the orchestra, where he created veritable symphonies. Debussy shifted the centre of gravity back towards the drama, so that in *Pelléas* the music and the dialogue are in perfect harmony. There are no arias or recitatives to hold up the dramatic action, nor is there any thematic development in the orchestra to impede the dialogue. The vocal parts in general follow the inflections of the speaking voice. Under this the orchestra lays a tapestry of sound—restrained, delicate, incomparably rich—accentuating and assisting the drama, but never overwhelming it except in a few moments of emotional climax.

Debussy was also indebted to Wagner for an elaborate system of leading motives, but here again the Frenchman used the German's idea with refinements of his own. The Wagnerian motives are usually the chief thematic material



wherever they appear, either in the vocal lines or in the orchestra, so that their purpose and importance can never be missed. In his critical diatribes against Wagner, Debussy always ridiculed this usage of leading motives, likening it to a person presenting his calling card every time he appears on the stage. The motives in *Pelléas* are often so concealed that many of them are not clearly identified even after repeated hearings, but can only be unearthed from a study of the score. This somewhat recondite procedure is in keeping with the substance of the drama itself.

That *Pelléas* and *Mélisande* should have been a puzzling and controversial work is not surprising. Even today it appeals to a limited sector of the operatic public. Here is an opera with not the slightest concession to display or effect; with singing parts that require not a note of vocal gymnastics, but instead a deep knowledge of the art of acting; with an orchestral part that has the delicacy of chamber music, and a story which progresses with little dramatic action in a world of shadow and impalpability. It required genius of a high order to infuse such material with vitality and enduring interest; it is obvious therefore why *Pelléas* remains an isolated work which Debussy himself was never able to duplicate.

Innumerable elements in this score indicate Debussy's gifts as a tonal dramatist. Every person in *Pelléas* comes to life, portrayed first by the characteristics of his own vocal line and second by an orchestral commentary. The growing love between Pelléas and Mélisande, upon which the entire play revolves, is developed with a subtlety which only the French seem to understand. Through a series of scenes, which in other hands might well have become disjointed, the long curve of emotional interest rises steadily to the climax of Pelléas' death; it recedes with the death of Mélisande, a scene of pathos unsurpassed in the whole range of opera.

The score is strewn with remarkable tone pictures, all of them veiled in the same aura of misty illusion which clothes the drama. Those scenes which are dominated by Golaud are darkened by sombre orchestral colouring; those between Pelléas and Mélisande are often bathed in an amazing instrumental light. Debussy's powers of evocation were never more compelling than in these references to the gloom and shadow of the ancient castle, to the forest and the fountain, and the magical vistas of the bordering sea.

The musical fabric of *Pelléas* is a synthesis of Debussy's mature style. One aspect in particular holds a clue to his artistic credo which was long misunderstood, i.e. his preoccupation with pure melodic beauty. When his music was new to the world and for a long time thereafter, it was the boldness and variety of his harmonic invention which seemed to be its main feature. Today, however, when the originality of these harmonies has been worn down by imitations and repetitions, it is the melodic line that rises to sustain the listener's interest. Debussy's skill as a melodist was long overlooked because his melodies were neither harmonized, developed nor featured according to age-old standards of practice. During his lifetime the criticism levelled against him had one recurring theme: that he was no melodist; indeed, that he was deliberately trying to destroy the importance of melody in the musical scheme. Against this idea Debussy himself protested vigorously. "My music," he said, "aims only at being melody. . . ." The truth of this claim is now perfectly clear. Debussy was in fact a superb melodist, and it remains his melody and not his harmony which has given his music its greatest vitality. Now that the surprise is gone from its harmonic investiture, his melody appears in all its originality and charm

—lines in which condensed, pregnantly expressed thematic germs and bold intervals alternate with delicate curves, with a feeling of the decorative always predominating. These melodies almost never extend or proliferate into the long-flowing contours of conventional development. Rather, they appear as sudden flashes of thematic light that float in the air for an instant and then are gone.

## IX

The sea held great fascination for Debussy, even though his life in Paris gave him comparatively few opportunities to view it at first hand. In *Pelléas and Mélisande* there are various allusions which clearly indicate its mysterious hold on his imagination. In 1904 these impulses bore fruit in "La Mer" ["The Sea"], which he termed a set of three "symphonic sketches".

"La Mer" is the nearest that Debussy ever came to writing a symphony, that is to say, the nearest in point of spaciousness and general outline. Its three movements are entirely separate, but they are conjoined by a common style and an overall mood. The work is large, varied, and yet unified, in the symphonic manner, even though it contains nothing of conventional symphonic construction or development.

"La Mer" is a complete refutation of the notion, often propagated, that Debussy's was necessarily a small-scaled art, that it was fragmentary, circumscribed, effeminate. That was an illusion too often created by the purposeful restraints which he imposed upon his style. In "La Mer" he gave scope to his music in accordance with the demands of the subject matter, and the result is a work of magnificent amplitude. It is Debussy's masterpiece in the field of orchestral writing, and one of the enduring monuments of musical impressionism.

The three parts of "La Mer" are titled: I. "De l'aube à midi sur la mer" ["From Dawn till Noon on the Ocean"]; II. "Jeux de vagues" ["Sport of the Waves"]; III. "Dialogue du vent et de la mer" ["Dialogue of the Wind and Sea"]. Otherwise there is no record of any programmatic idea in the mind of the composer. Nothing more is needed, for his mastery of musical colour, atmosphere, and evocation is so complete that the work becomes a procession of vivid canvases, each representing some one of the endlessly changing aspects of the sea. The means by which these images are formed are never obvious. They spring from all sorts of subtle and devious uses of melody, harmony, rhythm, and orchestral colouring—an immense technical apparatus which is concentrated upon the central problem. The opening bars indicate the composer's method. A few notes are heard in the very low and high strings, the sound of tympani and harps, a woodwind, a muted trumpet—and instantly the feeling is projected of profound depth, with a surface of glassy calm. Thereafter that illusion of the sea is never for a moment lost, through three extended and varied movements. The mystery of a great body of water, its impenetrable and weighty depths, its surface that is either rippling with delicate spray or a tumult of enormous waves—even the sky that can be sullen with rainclouds, or ablaze with the noonday sun—all this is contained in Debussy's music, for those who are willing to follow him with their own imaginations.

"La Mer" is heavy with unnamed and unexplained emotion, the emotion engendered by the sea itself in the heart of the beholder. This music is never static. It moves through a wide dramatic range, with climaxes of a magnitude and splendour seldom indulged in by this composer. At one moment the sky

may be leaden, the sea green or cobalt. In the next instant the whole scene is pierced by light; there is a gorgeous climax, startling as a seascape by Turner, in which the orchestral canvas is one suffusion of golden vaporous mist.

After "La Mer" Debussy spent some half-dozen years upon another orchestral task, one which caused him some of his hardest creative labours, but which yielded one final masterpiece. The work was a triptych titled "Images", the separate pieces being called "Gigues", "Ibéria", and "Rondes de printemps". It was the central panel—a dazzlingly exotic impression of Spain—which was the work of enduring quality.

Debussy knew almost nothing of Spain from personal experience. His biographers believe that apart from a few hours of a single day which he spent watching a bullfight in the border town of San Sebastián, he had never actually set foot inside the country. He did know some Spanish music, in particular certain piano works of Albeniz, which captivated him. Out of this fragmentary experience he wove a vivid musical fabric, one whose authenticity was vouched for by Spain's greatest composer, Manuel de Falla. Falla could find nothing but praise for this "intensely expressive and richly varied music".

The three parts of "Ibéria" are titled: I. "Par les rues et par les chemins" ["In the Streets and Byways"]; II. "Les parfums de la nuit" ["The Fragrance of the Night"]; III. "Le Matin d'un jour de fête" ["The Morning of the Festival Day"]. In describing these scenes Debussy raised his impressionistic art to its highest point of brilliance and effectiveness. The condensation of its ideas alone would make it a technical *tour de force*. It was said that Turgenev, in the process of creating a novel, usually wrote his story at great length; then he compressed it ruthlessly, until the finished product contained not a single phrase or word that did not contribute the maximum of strength to his story. Debussy did not actually work in this fashion (unless he did it subconsciously), but the effect of music like "Ibéria" is that of an even more extreme distillation. The composer extracts from the Spanish melodic idiom only the few essential notes, the characteristic contours; he animates them with a whole gamut of rhythms which are the backbone of the Spanish style; and finally he tinctures his orchestration with the sound of castanets, tambourines, bells, and guitarlike strummings in the strings. Not one of these effects is handled obviously. Debussy's method is still that of suggestion, of insinuation; his pictures are those which shift and change and dissolve as in a vivid dream. One of his most exquisite pages is the second part, a nocturne which recalled for Falla "the intoxicating spell of Andalusian nights". The closing section, on the other hand, is his most brilliant movement, in which a riot of colour and life, under the sun-drenched skies of Spain, is flashed across the musical screen.

# X

In the period immediately before and after the composition of "La Mer", Debussy's interest in the piano brought forth a series of remarkable works. The piano was singularly his own instrument; he loved it, and it was the only one of which he had any technical mastery. The creation of an impressionistic piano style, however, was one of the most difficult tasks that he attempted. This was due both to the technical limitations of the instrument and the type of piano-writing which had been in vogue from the invention of the piano down to his own time.

Most of the important piano composers of the nineteenth century—Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann, Liszt—still based their music primarily on the idioms and figures that best accommodated the human hand and fingers. True, they had not by any means bound themselves to these limitations to the extent that the eighteenth-century composers had done; Chopin especially had made wide exploitations of the field of pure sonority. Nevertheless, it was the consideration of the fingers and their dexterity which still hampered much of their thinking.

Debussy's advances in piano music are largely developments of new sonorities and tonal effects. To realize his ideas he had to discard much of the conventional technical apparatus—the scales and arpeggios, the octaves and the orthodox chordal formations which had come to be “handy” to the pianist. For these he substituted his own highly individual chords and chord progressions, arpeggios full of alien notes, wholly new and different melody and accompaniment material, copious use of dissonance-creating chords, plus a continual reliance upon tone colour for its own sake.

To the older pianists, schooled in the Chopin-Liszt traditions, Debussy's new style remained a mystery. It was full of idioms which they had never before encountered and which seemed odd to the eye and ear alike. It gave them a whole new series of technical problems to solve, some of which seemed perversely unsuited to the capabilities of the hand. The composer's experiments in strange tone colours and dissonance repelled them. To this day many of the older virtuosos of the keyboard avoid Debussy's music. It has required a new generation of pianists, some of them frankly calling themselves specialists in his music, to give these works their just due.

The whole of Debussy's piano output is made up of short pieces. The early works bear chiefly abstract titles, but in his maturity pieces based on pictures or descriptive ideas predominate. The range of subjects is wide, as if the artist were chiefly concerned with letting his imagination range over as varied a field as possible. Some of these pieces are scenes from Nature—“*Clair de lune*” [“Moonlight”], “*Jardins sous la pluie*” [“Gardens in the Rain”], “*Reflets dans l'eau*” [“Reflections in the Water”], “*Poissons d'or*” [“Goldfish”]. Others like “*Pagodes*” or “*Soirée dans Grenade*” recall a certain locality; a few are modern, sophisticated transformations of some old musical style or form—“*Sarabande*”, “*Toccata*”, “*Hommage à Rameau*”. Even in his two books of Preludes (which according to tradition are abstract in form) Debussy appended to each piece a short phrase which gives a descriptive clue, e.g. “*La Cathédrale engloutie*” [“The Engulfed Cathedral”], “*La Fille aux cheveux de lin*” [“The Girl with the Flaxen Hair”], “*Des Pas sur la neige*” [“Footprints in the Snow”], “*Feux d'artifice*” [“Fireworks”].

A work like “*Reflets dans l'eau*” may be quoted as typical of Debussy's piano style at its best, and an indication of his methods and his skill. The picture it calls to mind is that of a quiet pool, deep and secluded. For a brief moment the surface is disturbed by gusts of wind which set the water to rippling, the shadows to moving; then these vagrant reflections return slowly to repose. The piece has only the barest suggestion of melodic lines. It is all chords, glassy and dissonant, and arpeggios that swoop and glisten and undulate the length of the piano keyboard. The suggestion of wavering, distorted reflection is gained by dissonant chord formations and free modulations; there is in fact but one purely tonic chord in the entire piece—a magnificently contrived arpeggio on E flat, set with superb effect at the climax of the piece.

There is an intimate, personal quality about all Debussy's piano music,

Like the composer himself, it is moody rather than sentimental. With its pictorial substance there is always a strong feeling of the decorative, and a craftsmanship that is always fastidious. It is also remarkably concise. The composer goes straight to the heart of whatever idea or picture he is projecting, no matter how subtle.

# XI

The decline in Debussy's creative powers was a great misfortune for modern music. "Ibéria" was his last undisputed masterpiece; thereafter almost everything he composed shows traces first of unevenness, then dullness, and finally downright sterility. Two of the three "Images"—"Gigues" and "Rondes de printemps"—were themselves an indication that something was wrong, for neither begins to approach the inspiration of "Ibéria". The composer had always been a slow worker, waiting patiently for months and even years for a particular idea which would satisfy his high standards; but after he had passed fifty and his illness developed he grew less scrupulous. Much of his work was turned out on order and in suspicious haste.

In 1911, Debussy wrote incidental music to "The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian", a miracle play by Gabriele D'Annunzio. At its production that year in Paris Ida Rubinstein impersonated the saint, and Leon Bakst designed the scenery and costumes. Debussy wrote his score in the short space of two months, and he left the orchestration to the conductor. That hurried procedure was later adduced as evidence of his disinterest in this music, but the fact is that the composer was deeply affected by the subject of the play. He tried his best to evoke the mystic ecstasy of the story of the youthful Roman martyr whose body was transfixed by the arrows of his fellow archers. To gain an archaic effect he made many uses of the Gregorian modes, successions of simple diatonic chords without sevenths, as well as some hints of organum. He tried to combine (as does the play) the ecstatic purity, the thin clear flame of the early Christian faith, with the empurpled sumptuousness of its Roman background.

Debussy's score has been highly praised, and some have even called it a French *Parsifal*. That estimate can hardly be sustained. Only in portions can this music stand by itself. Its basic function was to heighten the stage representation, not to dominate it. It needs visual realization—the assistance of stage pictures, actors, and pantomimists. Most serious of all, this music lacks a continuous flow of new ideas. Much of the time the composer is simply imitating himself.

As the years went on and his health declined, Debussy's whole art crystallized into mannerisms and formulas. Like so many first-rate artists whose inspiration fails, he was falling back upon technique. The outbreak of World War I depressed him terribly; following that there were surgical operations and continual worry over his financial affairs. His attempts at creative writing betray only fatigue and impoverishment of idea and imagination. At first he seemed not to realize what was happening to him, for he tried to go on, exhausting himself with projects which were now beyond his strength. When he did give up, barely a year before he died, it was the body and not the spirit which had failed him. "There are mornings," he wrote, "when the effort of dressing seems like one of the twelve labours of Hercules."

Debussy bequeathed a very great legacy to music. His impressionism was clearly a part of the main romantic movement, but it was a new and revivifying

influence at a time when romanticism was heading for decay. Moreover, Debussy's impressionism was far more than merely a personal style. It also included an immense new technical apparatus which gave the composers who came after him a whole new set of tools with which to work. This fact is only recently being realized—now that Debussy's ideas have permeated musical thought the world over. His uses of neglected scales like the whole-tone and pentatonic scales, his revival of the medieval modes and organum, his bold use of totally unrelated chords; his reliance upon chords of the seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth—above all his treatment of the chord as an element of beauty apart from melody—all these ideas can now be found in imitation in the music of every country, in popular mediums like music for sound films, and even in the commonest dance-band arrangements. They are part of the new language of music.

The power to attract imitators is by no means the criterion of greatness; Debussy had much more than that. It is clear now that for all its wraithlike incorporeality, its evocation of the dream within a dream, his music has nevertheless the peculiar vitality of all art that endures. Some of it is now fifty years old, and it is wearing better than anything yet produced in the present century.

# Strauss

1861



WHEN GOETHE WAS AN OLD MAN HE REVISITED A CHALET IN THE THURINGIAN hills, and on the walls of the bedroom he found the words he had written there on a night thirty-three years before. The inspiration of his young manhood was *Ein Gleiches* ('*Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh'*'), one of the most famous, and surely one of the loveliest poems in the German language. As the old poet-philosopher retraced the faded writing of his lost youth, he wept.

It is not recorded that Richard Strauss in his later years ever acknowledged any such show of emotion as he turned the pages of his own youthful masterpieces (say, the closing bars of "*Don Juan*", with its stabbingly poignant episode of the libertine's death); but if he did, he had more to lament than vanished youth. He would have had to weep, too, over the far more grievous loss of his genius. For more than thirty years—that is, since he produced *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1911—the Strauss who set the modern music world aflame has been, to all intents and purposes, dead.

There is no phenomenon quite like it in music. In the case of Schumann and Debussy failure of inspiration was caused by disease. Rossini got tired of composing. At the age of thirty-seven, with a score of successful operas behind him, Rossini simply quit, and for forty years wrote almost nothing besides his "*Stabat Mater*". Strauss did not stop with *Der Rosenkavalier*. He went right on composing one score after another, turning the wheels of a technical machine that is one of the marvels of our time, but producing little that was even faintly warmed by inspiration.

Strauss as an old man has had the melancholy experience of sitting by and watching the slow disintegration of what was once the outstanding reputation in modern music. At the turn of the century he was the colossus of the art of music, the arch-modernist, the *Übermensch*. His tone poems were a nine days' wonder; later, two of his operas were the most provocative, the most shocking works yet set upon the lyric stage. Unfortunately for him, Strauss has lived into a new day, and time has scaled down almost everything he created. This is not to say that he is a dead issue; on the contrary, at least six of his orchestral works maintain their popularity in symphonic repertoires, and his *Rosenkavalier* is still one of the finest comedies the opera house has to offer. But no one is awed any longer by Strauss's music, or disturbed by it, or even puzzled. It is quite evidently the end of an epoch in the romantic movement in German music, not the beginning of anything radically new. For all its immense energy it is

fading. More than that, its decline is a portent of what has happened to the main stream of German music that began with the immediate predecessors of Bach and Handel. With Strauss (unless all signs fail) that flowing torrent has at last begun to dry up.

Strauss began life as a boy prodigy like Mozart; in adolescence he became a Brahmsian classicist; in early manhood he gave promise of becoming so great a revolutionist that some dared to compare him with Beethoven; finally he emerged as a super-Liszt, an electrifying romantic. Like Liszt's, his music has not been able to retain the prestige which an adulating world once pressed upon it.

Strauss was born in Munich on June 11, 1864. It seemed that the gods had given him all the gifts that a musical genius might require. There was a strong strain of music in his ancestry. His father, the first horn player of the Munich Opera, was a musician of distinction. There was also wealth in the family. His mother was one of the Pschorrs, brewers of a famous Munich beer. Richard Strauss began to indicate an unusual talent for music when he was only five years old, and at six he was composing pieces for the piano. After that he received every advantage of fine schooling and the best training in music. At the age of sixteen he had a large number of compositions to his credit, including a symphony. Two years later the symphony was performed in public, under the direction of Hermann Levi, who first conducted Wagner's *Parsifal*.

These early compositions of Richard Strauss are seldom heard today. The young man who later seemed such a revolutionist began as a thoroughgoing classicist, whose models were Schumann and Brahms. As yet he remained untouched by Wagner, possibly because his father, a musician of the old school, was outspoken in his abhorrence of everything Wagnerian.

When he was nineteen another famous conductor, Hans von Bülow, took an interest in the young composer. Strauss became the assistant conductor of Bülow's orchestra at Meiningen, and that step produced two important effects in his life. First, he learned the art of conducting from one of the masters of orchestral craftsmanship. The method of the acid Bülow must have been both rigorous and harrowing. Strauss later recalled that the older man once made him compose a suite for wind instruments, and then made him stand before the orchestra and conduct it without a rehearsal. Strauss had great aptitude for what he was attempting. The orchestra was his personal instrument, as it was Wagner's, and his knowledge of its mechanics came as naturally to him as Bach's knowledge of the organ or Chopin's of the piano. The orchestra became the medium around which most of his creative ideas revolved throughout his career.

The second important effect of young Strauss's stay at Meiningen was his friendship with a man named Alexander Ritter, who was a violinist in the orchestra. Ritter was an intellectual and a passionate admirer of the works of Wagner, Liszt, and Berlioz—the entire romantic movement which the younger Germans of the day called “the music of the future”. Strauss has admitted that Ritter's counsel and his enthusiasm had a great effect on him. The results were immediately apparent. Up to the Meiningen period (which began late in 1883) Strauss's works all bore the impress of classicism of the Brahms type; apart from certain songs, they were in the form of sonatas, serenades, concertos, symphonies, etc. In 1887, after he had left Meiningen and become an assistant Kapellmeister at the Munich Opera, he wrote “Macbeth”, which was a tone poem—and the tone poem, as everyone knows, was the invention of Franz



Liszt. "Macbeth" was followed in 1888 by "Don Juan", and in 1889 by "Tod und Verklärung" ["Death and Transfiguration"]. These last two works were enormously successful, and at the age of twenty-five they made the young conductor the most-talked-of musician in Europe.

Strauss left Munich in 1889 to conduct at Weimar, where he held a post until 1894. Meanwhile, however, he had a physical breakdown from overwork which threatened his life. He spent a year touring Greece, Egypt, and Sicily, throwing off a dangerous ailment of the lungs. During his travels he worked on his first opera, *Guntram*, which was produced in 1894 at Weimar. Strauss later married the singer, Pauline de Ahna, who sang the leading role. *Guntram* is a gloomy tragedy of medieval Germany, with a libretto written by the composer himself. The opera was a failure, being a weak imitation of Wagner.

In the years that immediately followed Strauss made many appearances as conductor in various important German cities, and in Moscow, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Zurich, and Madrid. His real work, during the four years between 1895 and 1899, was the composition of four more tone poems—"Till Eulenspiegel", "Also sprach Zarathustra", "Don Quixote", and "Ein Heldenleben". One of these appeared each year, for four years. When they were finished Strauss was thirty-five years old, and the most towering figure in modern music.

## II

The tone poem (or symphonic poem) was one of the few inventions in form which we owe to the romantic movement in music, and it was created practically single-handed by Franz Liszt. The Abbé obviously got the idea from the overture as that form had been developed by Beethoven, i.e. a single orchestral movement which relates in tone the general scheme of a drama to follow. Berlioz had developed the same idea on a much bigger scale in his programme symphonies, a form which Liszt imitated in his "Faust" and "Dante" symphonies, but Liszt alone set the style for the shorter type of work, and it remains (with his Hungarian Rhapsodies) his most original contribution to music.

Liszt coined the title "symphonic poem" for these pieces. He wrote thirteen of them in all, including "Les Préludes", "Orpheus", "Prometheus", "Tasso", "Mazeppa", and "Hunnenschlacht". Today only "Les Préludes" remains green, although the battering it has taken at popular concerts, including motion-picture stage shows, leaves its future in doubt.

Liszt's procedure was to depict in tone a fairly short poetic idea or story. He generally prefaced his score with a programme note, setting forth the meaning of his piece. The tone-poem idea was a distinct success. It was quickly taken up by other composers and resulted in some of the most picturesque music of the romantic era. It remained for Richard Strauss to develop the tone poem into a work of epic proportions. His early "Macbeth" and "Don Juan" are clearly in the style of Liszt—fairly short and easy to follow even without benefit of a guiding programme note. The ensuing works become longer and more complex, until with "Ein Heldenleben" the form has grown into a gigantic structure of six sections, each almost as long as a single symphonic movement. For the full understanding of the work a detailed knowledge of the scenario is a necessity.

"Macbeth" must be classed as an immature work. It is a sombre score, containing passages of strength and vividness; but it remains of interest chiefly

as a study of a young genius in embryo. "Don Juan", however, is wholly remarkable, and as the work of a man twenty-four years old it must rank as one of the most extraordinary scores produced in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Strauss prefaced "Don Juan" with verses from a dramatic poem by the Hungarian poet, Nikolaus Lenau. The general theme, it appears, is something more than the libertine's search after women. "My 'Don Juan'," explained the poet himself, "is no hot-blooded man eternally pursuing women. It is the longing in him to find a woman who is to him incarnate womanhood, and to enjoy, in the one, all women on earth, whom he cannot as individuals possess. Because he does not find her although he reels from one to another, at last disgust seizes hold of him, and this disgust is the devil that fetches him."

Strauss's portrait of this Don Juan is amazingly vivid, swiftly realized and, at the end, pathetic. It is a score of immense vitality and zest. In the very opening bars the music fairly rips itself from the instruments in its eagerness to be born. Thereafter it alternates between headlong impetuosity, even violence, and a sensuous lyricism. The scoring is brilliantly articulate throughout. Strauss at twenty-four is already a master of this complex instrument, and every one of his effects is thrust home to the hilt. When Debussy once criticized his rival's music he admitted its "cyclonic energy" and its composer's "amazing orchestral assurance". The terms were apt. With "Don Juan" a veritable cyclone was let loose in orchestral music, and it would be many years before the storm would begin to blow itself out.

"Death and Transfiguration" is a larger and more pretentious work than "Don Juan", but it has not worn as well with the passage of years. It owes a heavy debt to Liszt, especially to "Les Préludes". There is a striking similarity between the poetic ideas which shape the course of the two works. Strauss's scenario is set forth in a poem prefaced to the score. It was written by his friend Ritter after the music was finished. A man is lying upon his death-bed, exhausted by his struggle for life. In his delirium he relives the scenes of his childhood, of his youth, and the heroic aspirations of young manhood. At last death seizes him, but from the worn-out body the spirit ascends heavenward in a radiant apotheosis.

"Death and Transfiguration" is undeniably one of the most effective of Strauss's works. The long section at the close which represents the transfiguration is masterfully contrived—a prolonged crescendo that reaches one of the most overpowering climaxes in orchestral music. Strauss holds the orchestra in a giant grip, forcing from it the absolute maximum of sonority. For years this physical magnitude of "Death and Transfiguration" held listeners and composers alike spellbound. It was only after the German cult of vastness in music had collapsed in the years following World War I that the weaknesses of this score and the imitations it engendered became evident. It is the familiar story of thematic material which lacks the beauty and dignity necessary for the architectural frame it attempts to fill. There is a disturbing commonplace quality, even a cheapness, about some of the Strauss melodies which no amount of orchestral craftsmanship can efface. The result is magniloquence, with Teutonic sentimentality underscored and overblown.

"Till Eulenspiegel" followed five years after "Death and Transfiguration". It is a piece of musical humour which many admirers of Strauss's work would not trade for anything else he has written. For cleverness and wit, for gusto and impudent high spirits, the piece has few rivals anywhere in music. The

entire title of the piece gives some clue to its contents: "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks, Set in the Old-time Roguish Manner, in Rondo Form, for Full Orchestra." Till Eulenspiegel is a comic hero and vagabond who appears in German literature as far back as 1515. (The name Eulenspiegel means literally "owl's mirror".) Till's escapades and pranks, many of them crude, elephantine, and even obscene, are part of the folk-lore of Germany.

Strauss supplied no written programme for his rondo (he admitted that several of the episodes suggested "might even give rise to offence"), but the general idea has been pieced out. Till is followed through various scrapes—riding on a horse pell-mell through the market-place and upsetting all the tin-ware; disguising himself as a priest, then as a cavalier boldly making love; and finally finding himself in the hands of the constabulary. The high court condemns the rogue to the gallows, and that indeed is his end—a final squeaking of woodwinds as he is strung up.

There can be little but praise for Strauss's sense of humour in this superb score. It is as vivid and colourful and essentially human as a Breughel canvas, and its coarseness would have been loved by young Mozart. The comic aptness of the themes and their charm, the expert handling of the orchestration, and above all the tremendous energizing speed and force of the piece have made it irresistible. Even if Strauss had not subsequently written two other great essays in humour ("Don Quixote" and the opera *Der Rosenkavalier*) this score alone would have made him a Rabelais of music.

Strauss's creation of a tone poem based on Nietzsche's philosophical work, *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus Spake Zarathustra), was the most ambitious and difficult task he ever attempted for orchestra. He took for his model one of the most controversial books of modern times. The origins of *Also sprach Zarathustra* go back to the hero-worship of Richard Wagner by the neurotic young philologist, Friedrich Nietzsche, during the composer's days at Triebtschen. That friendship had ended in rupture, and then in bitterness and hatred. Later Nietzsche was so revolted by *Parsifal* that he poured vitriol over Wagner and all his works: "He flatters every kind of Christianity and every religious form and expression of decadence. . . . Wagner . . . a decrepit and desperate romantic. . . ." Meanwhile Nietzsche had had a dangerous mental breakdown and a broken love affair. He went to Italy and then high into the Alps, where he brooded in solitude—frustration, egotism, and inspiration all boiling within him. In the spring of 1883, when Wagner was dying in Venice, Nietzsche began *Also sprach Zarathustra*, a flaming answer to the composer's theatrical Christianity, and his own masterpiece. This prose poem, this philosophical rhapsody, was nothing less than a damnation of the whole idea of Christian morality, and a glorification instead of the pagan virtues of strength which should produce the Superman. When Richard Strauss composed his tone poem based on the work, a decade after it appeared, Nietzsche was long since hopelessly insane.

Nietzsche's Zarathustra is supposedly Zoroaster, the ancient Persian seer, who attempts to solve the riddle of the universe. His philosophical adventures form the basis of the book. Strauss specifically disclaimed any intention to "write philosophical music, or to portray in music Nietzsche's great work". He simply chose certain passages and episodes from the book, piecing them together to form a musical rather than a philosophical fabric.

In the introduction Zarathustra salutes the rising sun. "Thou great star! What would be thy happiness, were it not for those for whom thou shinest?" Thereafter he begins his quest. He tries to find the answer to his questions in

religion, in joys and passions, and in brooding upon death ; but nothing satisfies him. He turns to science, and again is disillusioned ; then to the dance and laughter and song. As night falls he dreams of love, but his sleep is broken by the deep ringing of the midnight bell. The work ends in a veil of mystery, the music sounding in two keys at once, indicating that the enigma of the cosmos remains unsolved.

Even though he strictly limited the scope of his tone poem in relation to Nietzsche's original, Strauss nevertheless undertook an audacious task in welding a mass of amorphous material into a musical whole. His piece is in one gigantic movement, as long as an average modern symphony. There are some ten different sections, merging one into another ; but they are varied in mood, giving the effect of a series of musical illustrations, each describing an episode in Nietzsche's book.

There has been wide disagreement about the ultimate value of this work. Some have called it Strauss's orchestral masterpiece ; others find it his most uneven score, a failure which has served to point up the essential weaknesses of the composer's entire style. About the introductory section of the tone poem—Zarathustra's invocation to the rising sun—there has never been any disagreement. It is one of the great exordiums of music—enormous, portentous, a solemn declaration by the entire orchestra and organ in the blazing white key of C major. This is one effect which Strauss, the master of orchestral effect, never surpassed. If "Also sprach Zarathustra" could have maintained the inspirational level of these opening bars there would never be any question of its value ; instead it is spotted throughout with unevenness and inequality. There is no denying the dramatic power of the work, the superb mixtures of contrapuntal sound, the enormous vigour, the breath-taking orchestral virtuosity. But vitiating its power and its dignity are overmellifluous melodies and sugary harmonies in the manner of Liszt. The section called "Dance Song" is the worst blemish of all. It is a Viennese waltz which sounds almost like a deliberate cliché. Moreover, too much of this music depends for its interest upon a knowledge of the scenario ; it does not always stand upon its own feet.

### III

For his next tone poem Strauss turned from a modern literary masterpiece to a venerable classic, and from philosophy back to humour. His inspiration was Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. The piece was composed at Munich in 1897. Strauss gave it the sub-title : "Fantastic Variations on a Theme of Knightly Character". Its form is roughly an introduction, theme and variations, and finale. The solo 'cello plays a part so important that the work is also in the nature of a modern concerto for that instrument.

As in the case of "Also sprach Zarathustra", the composer makes no attempt to digest the original work as a whole. His piece is simply a series of musical illustrations of some of the more famous episodes. In the introduction the old gentleman of La Mancha is portrayed as he "passed his time reading books of knight-errantry. . . . He would pore on until it was day, and a-days he would read on until it was night ; and thus, by sleeping little and reading much, the moisture of his brain was exhausted to that degree, that at last he lost the use of his reason." The orchestra gradually becomes a fantastic confusion of sound as the would-be knight's reason finally cracks. Then the two-part theme

is announced: Don Quixote is voiced by the solo 'cello; Sancho Panza is personified by a comical theme in the tenor tuba and bass clarinet (later taken by the solo viola). The ten variations which follow describe the various sallies of the pair in search of knightly adventure—the famous joust with the windmills; the attack on a flock of sheep which the Don imagines is a “prodigious army of divers and innumerable nations”: the Don's dissertations on the glories of chivalry; the attack on a band of pilgrims whom he mistakes for ruffians; his dreams of Dulcinea as the ideal woman; the meeting with three country wenches, one of whom he imagines is his beloved; the wild ride through the air and in a magic boat; his humiliating defeat and his resolve to become a shepherd—and so on until the melancholy end when the knight, his wits restored, meets his death.

Out of this fanciful material Strauss constructed a huge, sprawling, baroque score—luxuriant, humorous, pathetic and, at flashing moments, banal. It surpasses everything that he wrote for orchestra, with the exception of “Till Eulenspiegel”; it proves that humour was his great mood, and that as a humorist in music he has few peers since Mozart. Even more than “Zarathustra” it leans upon an elaborate scenario, without which innumerable details become diffuse and unintelligible. But it far surpasses the earlier work in its lack of pretentiousness, its essential humanity, and above all in the fidelity with which the ideas, the scenes and the characters are painted in music.

Technically speaking, “Don Quixote” is a stunning piece of work. Such a large and exuberant score, filled as it is with all sorts of grotesque and incongruous details, was first of all a problem in organization. As his title indicates, Strauss built it upon the variation form, deliberately choosing for its appositeness to his story as old-fashioned a matrix as a composer has at his command. But there is nothing old-fashioned in the use he makes of it; on the contrary it is an amazing example of modernized classicism. From a few basic thematic seeds are developed a forest of melodic and accompaniment ideas.

Equally amazing is the polyphonic texture of the score. Wagner had set a new standard in his use of a modern type of free counterpoint, and Strauss goes beyond Wagner. His boldness and ingenuity in the multilined weaving of themes remains unsurpassed in modern music. The same is true of his instrumentation, which must give definition, clarification, and individual colour to this wealth of polyphonic material. “Don Quixote” is very nearly an étude in orchestration by a past master of the art. It is one of the most difficult of modern scores to perform, for in inexperienced hands the flood of instrumental details and subtleties turn quickly to mud, and the heavily laden orchestra part tends to swamp the solo 'cello. Well-played, however, it offers music of rare beauty and distinction.

The lasting greatness of “Don Quixote” depends upon something more than its mechanics. It will live because it is a segment of human life, portrayed not in words or in paint but in tone. Strauss is here the authentic creator of human character. Ernest Newman wrote that “Strauss's Sancho is very humorous, but your laughter at him is always softened with tears; while the portrait of Quixote has an added touch of pathos in that it invariably suggests the spare, worn frame of the poor, middle-aged knight”. The composer is also the natural story-teller who can make a reader love a character enough to feel genuine grief at his end. Strauss had a peculiar affection for death scenes. Like Galsworthy, he could not resist bringing his characters to the “quiet-coloured end of evening”. At the close of “Don Quixote” he achieved the most touching of all his

descriptions of a dying man, and one that is likely to remain a classic in the art of music.

Like the swing of a pendulum, Strauss's next tone poem, "Ein Heldenleben" ["A Hero's Life"], took him away from humour and back again to the extremes of seriousness and sentimentality. This huge work was written in 1898 and was the last of the tone-poem series. It is based not upon any known literary work but upon a scenario which the composer evolved himself. It had grown to be Strauss's rather curious habit to deny the existence of a background story to his tone poems, and then later to give sanction to an "official description" by some friend or disciple. In the case of "Ein Heldenleben" he declared that he was not portraying any particular hero of fact or fiction, "but rather a more general and free ideal of great and manly heroism". Furthermore, the hero's adventures were those of the spiritual rather than the material world.

The authentic guidebooks of "Ein Heldenleben" divide it into six main sections: I. "The Hero"; II. "The Hero's Adversaries"; III. "The Hero's Courtship"; IV. "The Hero's Battlefield"; V. "The Hero's Works of Peace"; VI. "The Hero's Release from the World".

The first section is a tremendous exposition of the man of valour, with bold themes—octaves wide—surging up through the orchestra and breaking into climaxes of overpowering height. Subsidiary themes indicate that the hero is not only valorous; he is noble, proud, sensitive, a paragon of virtue. His adversaries on the contrary are the meanest of the mean. The woodwinds utter "shrill and snarling phrases", music that is purposely repulsive and harsh. Two tubas proclaim a sinister phrase made up of open parallel fifths, which is Strauss's deliberate gibe at the reactionaries and the pedants of music. The Hero's beloved is portrayed by the solo violin in a series of elaborate cadenzalike figures. She is an elusive creature and definitely capricious; the Hero pursues her through a long and involved courtship which ends in a love scene of impassioned splendour.

The dream of love is interrupted by "grim-visaged war". There ensues the biggest of all musical battle scenes, and some of the loudest music yet written for orchestra. The Hero is triumphant of course. He returns, his brow "bound with victorious wreaths", to take up his great works of peace. Oddly enough, this portion of the music (and very beautiful music some of it is) appears to be made up of themes from Strauss's own previous works—the tone poems, the opera *Guntram*, and the song "Traum durch die Dammerung". After another short struggle with his adversaries the Hero reaches the moment of his release from the world. His death is peaceful, made tender by thoughts of his beloved; but at the end the scene is a vast effulgence of orchestral radiance and light.

Strauss had hoped to create in this work a monumental study in valour. It is a miracle that he escaped producing instead a classic of pure sentimentality and fustian. The scenario is hopelessly sophomoric in its conceptions of heroism, and the music never fully escapes that fact. It alternates between noble beauty and shoddy theatricality. The composer's gift for sharp portraiture is here conspicuously absent. This Hero has little of the blood of reality in him. Strauss did not realize what every great novelist has known—that characters who are all virtue are generally dull. The lack of real human sympathy in this score and the presence instead of its manufactured heroics are responsible for some of its prime weaknesses. It does not bear repeated hearings, but cloy more quickly than any other of Strauss's big works.

What saves "Ein Heldenleben" from ruin and makes it instead one of the

composer's most popular works is his unfailing technical resource. Here (as in "Don Quixote") he is working at the absolute maximum of his powers, and for a combination of lush melodic invention, polyphonic resourcefulness, and orchestral virtuosity it would be hard to cap this work. Strauss handles the huge unwieldy bulk of material with ease, shaping it into an effective dramatic whole. Nevertheless "Ein Heldenleben" contains the unmistakable signs of disintegration that overtook both Strauss and the type of music he stood for. It was his last great success in purely orchestral writing, even though he had almost forty years of creative life ahead of him. He had pushed his style, his craftsmanship and the tone-poem form itself to their very limits.

## IV

A general estimate of Richard Strauss of the tone poems requires first a glance at the reputation he enjoyed in the world of 1900. He was then the most provocative figure in modern music, and there was a widespread opinion that he was one of the very greatest of German masters. Nearly everyone was overpowered by the magnitude of the tone poems. Many conservatives were almost frightened by their power and their size. They were also horrified by the composer's reckless use of dissonance and discord, his choice of subject matter, his startling realistic effects—like the bleating of the sheep and the use of a wind machine in "Don Quixote". Some of the commonest adjectives used in connection with Strauss's music were "abnormal", "eccentric", "deformed", "ugly", "psychopathic", "dangerous". The majority of the listening public, however, passed over practically all of these objections and were enthralled by what they heard. It seemed that Strauss was a first-rate musical creator who set himself enormous tasks and then realized them with stunning effect. It was commonly believed that he must be breaking the ground for a new era in music, one which would carry on to new conceptions of vastness and complexity.

The passage of years has destroyed one after another of these views. Strauss was far from being a real pioneer. He was simply forcing the romanticism of Weber, Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner to its extremes, and once he had reached his limit both he and his imitators were bankrupt. He was not nearly as great an inventor as Wagner; rather, he was a direct descendant of Liszt, for like Liszt he had ideas of penetration and originality but too often developed them in a meretricious way. His melodies have many of the weaknesses of Liszt's, and he does not compare with Wagner as a harmonist. For all its ornamentation his harmony is basically diatonic. It lacks the far-reaching freedom and the subtle, mysterious beauty of Wagner's. It was Debussy, not Strauss, who was the real pioneer in music in the late nineteenth century.

It is clear now that for all his facility, his technical wizardry, and his surface erudition Strauss was not a profound musical thinker. Rather, he was a brilliant and clever illustrator, fluent and powerfully sure of himself. It is also clear that his is a split personality, with two hemispheres in his creative brain struggling for ascendancy. On one side is the heavily Teutonic sentimentalist of "Don Juan", "Death and Transfiguration", "Also sprach Zarathustra", and "Ein Heldenleben"; on the other is the humorist of "Till Eulenspiegel" and "Don Quixote". Some of the most serious misconceptions about this composer have arisen from the failure of critics to recognize and evaluate these two extremes. For years many writers have been deploring Strauss's sense of humour as an

unfortunate streak of the vulgar in an otherwise great artist. Even an admirer like Lawrence Gilman spoke of the "deep-seated gaminerie in his nature, his tendency to mould a beautiful or touching or heroic tonal image, and then distort it by scrawling a bad joke somewhere in its surface. . . ." The sheep and the wind machine in "Don Quixote", the snarling adversaries in "Heldenleben", Till Eulenspiegel's clattering ride through the market-place, were once widely deplored as tasteless blemishes. No one pays much attention to them today. The real blemishes in Strauss are rather the pompous, corpulent Teutonic heroes themselves, and all the blatant, cumbersome striving after effects of cosmic importance. The composer can be forgiven when his humour becomes heavy-handed, for that is a racial trait; but nothing can excuse the ridiculous pomposity of the Hero's return from battle in "Ein Heldenleben". What failed the composer in such places was both his musical taste and his sense of humour.

With the close of his tone-poem period Richard Strauss entered, at thirty-five, the phase of his widest fame and prestige. In 1898 he had accepted the post of first conductor at the Berlin Imperial Opera, which was under the aegis of Kaiser Wilhelm II. That institution remained the centre of his activities for more than twenty years, but at the same time he was a familiar figure in opera houses and on concert platforms all over Europe. His was a figure to command respect—well over six feet tall, lean and straight, with a splendid head crowned by a bulging brow. Before an orchestra and in the opera pit he seemed extraordinarily tall and dominating. His handling of the orchestra was individual, but expert.

With Richard Strauss the modern type of creative musician appears in full stature. This was a musician who was first of all a man of the world—cultured, sure of his social prestige, proud of his art. Moreover, he was wealthy, for the popularity of his works all over the world soon began to pay him liberal sums in royalties. The contrast between Strauss and composers of the past is startling indeed. Bach, the poor church cantor, Haydn and Mozart, the social equals of servants and lackeys, Beethoven and Schubert living in their squalid Vienna lodgings, would have been amazed at the wealthy Strauss who was also the social equal of any aristocrat of his time. In the great days of pre-war Europe he stood on a par with the most illustrious scientists and pedagogues, statesmen and militarists; and the entire German nation exhibited him with pride. The man of music had at long last come into his own.

Strauss's personal life was never one to excite unusual interest. It was circumscribed from first to last by the arduous and unceasing labour of creating and producing music. For years it was the composer's habit to spend his summers at some country retreat, where he would have the solitude and the atmosphere necessary for the tough task of composition. Here the chief creative work on his scores would be accomplished. Back in Berlin during the winter months came the less taxing business of instrumentation and the finishing touches, work that could be carried on between opera and concert engagements.

Strauss could never complain of a wife who failed to appreciate him. Frau Strauss, having been an opera singer herself, seems to have understood with peculiar intuition the demands of her artist husband. In the Strauss household, it is said, she presided as a combination of wife, major-domo, and manager, so that the man whose destinies she was helping to guide would always appear to the world in the most appropriate surroundings and still be screened from its too inquisitive gaze. She has been pictured as a somewhat dominating



helpmate, who ruled with a firm hand a household in which beauty, quiet, and order were (with often insufferable thoroughness) maintained.

In the later years of their union Frau Strauss seems to have become a self-appointed priestess of her husband's musical inspiration. In 1923 he composed an operatic comedy, *Intermezzo*, with a libretto supposedly by himself. The chief characters are a famous composer and his wife—that is, the Strausses themselves, disguised not even thinly. The plot is an actual episode in their early married life, when the composer's wife opened a letter sent him, through an error, by a strange lady. Frau Strauss, very jealous, almost started divorce proceedings before the mistake was cleared up. *Intermezzo* was a resounding failure. It was said that Frau Strauss herself had insisted that her husband make an opera out of the episode and that she was the real author of the libretto. The same has been said of Strauss's ballet, "Schlagobers" ["Whipped Cream"], which told the story of a small boy who ate too much pastry, with the results typical of childhood. This was another failure, and it was openly remarked that Strauss "gallantly took responsibility for the story", which was "tastless and stupid".

The composer's own happiness in his home life during the early years of his career was published to the world in a unique way. In 1904 he made his first visit to America, taking with him the score of a new work. It was first performed on March 21 of that year, in Carnegie Hall and under the composer's direction. The work was the "Symphonia Domestica". It is in one extended movement with three subdivisions: Introduction and Scherzo, Adagio, Double Fugue and Finale. The composer announced at first that he wanted the work listened to as pure music, but later it appeared that the dedication of the score—"To My Dear Wife and Our Boy"—had a double significance. According to an official description published the next year the three main themes of the "Symphonia" portray the husband, the wife, and the child. One section is supposed to describe the noisy confusion of the baby's bath; another illustrates the ecstatic aunts saying that the child looks "just like his papa!" and "just like his mama!" There is also a lullaby as the child goes to sleep, and an awakening scene at seven in the morning.

The "Symphonia Domestica" is one of the most thoroughly lambasted of all Strauss's orchestral scores. It has been called dull, unhumorous, and downright embarrassing in its frank descriptions of the simple domesticities, and is often quoted as an example of the composer's unrestrained humour and his poor taste. As a matter of fact the comparative weakness of the "Symphonia Domestica" as music has little to do with Strauss's humour or his taste. It is rue that many people do not appreciate the particular brand of humour which uses a huge orchestra, the biggest of musical forms, and the most complex and varied technical devices to portray the tenderest of all human relationships. A heavy-handed procedure like that is typically Teutonic, recalling the humour which Brahms, for example, often applied in his speech and his correspondence, but never in his music. To those who are not German it might seem that Schumann and Wagner and Debussy were infinitely more subtle and discerning in their descriptions of childhood and domesticity than Strauss could possibly be in this enormous, overdeveloped, and overburdened score.

Actually, however, these criticisms are all beside the point. The real weakness of this "Symphonia" is the inequality of its melodic ideas. It has its lovely moments, like the exquisite cradle song, and the deeply felt love scene in the Adagio; but surrounding these green patches are too many desert wastes.

The melodic lines become dry and uninspired; no amount of polyphonic and instrumental legerdemain can hide their inherent sterility.

## v

As he approached his fortieth year Strauss's widening reputation was based entirely upon his tone poems. His two operas, *Guntram* and *Feuersnot* (1901), were failures, usually regarded as proof that the composer's talent lay in the orchestra and definitely not in the lyric theatre. Between 1905 and 1911, however, he produced three operas which created even greater excitement than any of the tone poems, and made him the most important contributor to German opera after Wagner. These were the two tragedies, *Salome* and *Elektra*, and the comic masterpiece, *Der Rosenkavalier*.

It would have been impossible to compose anything but a controversial opera on the subject of *Salome*. The original play was written by Oscar Wilde in French, and published in 1893. The next year it appeared in an English translation by Wilde's young friend, Lord Alfred Douglas, with the famous drawings by Aubrey Beardsley. Wilde had considerably embroidered the original legendary and scriptural story of the daughter of Herod's wife and her part in the death of John the Baptist. He contrived a drama in which *Salome* conceives an abnormal passion for the Evangelist, who rejects her with terrible anathemas. Herod is in turn enamoured of his step-daughter, and in a moment of drunken desire offers her half his kingdom if she will dance for him. *Salome* then performs the Dance of the Seven Veils. At its conclusion she demands her price—the head of John on a silver charger. Herod, almost insane with fear, tries to buy her off, but she is adamant. The severed head is finally brought to her and at last her desire is fulfilled: she kisses the mouth of John. Herod then orders his soldiers to crush *Salome* beneath their shields.

Wilde's original is a play to be read rather than performed. The bejewelled prose-poetry obfuscates the more revolting details of the plot, giving the whole work an air of unreality. Beardsley caught that quality in his drawings, which are superb in their fantastic decadence and grisly humour. The play was of course widely denounced as a work of corruption.

Strauss's opera follows the play faithfully, except that the dialogue is shortened somewhat. After the first performance in Dresden in 1905 it was an enormous success throughout Germany. In England it was banned, because of the law which forbade public portrayal of biblical characters. On the night of January 22, 1907, it was performed in New York, at the Metropolitan Opera House. The roar of public disapproval which arose forced the board of directors to withdraw the work after that single performance. *Salome* was not performed again at the Metropolitan for almost thirty years.

The critics of *Salome* in the early 1900s were all scandalized by what seemed to them a deliberate perversion of the art of music into something debased, if not positively diseased. They saw in it only the spectacle of a woman driven by a maniacal passion to sadism and necrophilia. Strauss's score was excoriated as a deliberate study in ugliness and morbidity, and as evidence of an alarming decay in the aesthetic of music itself.

*Elektra*, first performed in 1909, did little to allay the fears of the tender-minded. The central character, although chosen from one of the greatest classics of antiquity, was hardly less shocking than Wilde's daughter of Herodias. Nor was Strauss's treatment of his subject one whit less uncompromising.

The opera was based on a drama by the noted German playwright, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, whose original source was the Greek drama. Agamemnon, the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War, was murdered on his return by his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Aegisthus. His death was finally avenged by his son Orestes and his daughter Elektra. The story was a favourite theme of Greek legend and literature for several centuries. Aeschylus used it in his Oresteia trilogy, about the middle of the fifth century B.C. Later it was made the subject of dramas by both Euripides and Sophocles. The terrible story has had many ancient and modern counterparts, one of the most recent being Eugene O'Neill's trilogy, *Mourning Becomes Elektra*.

Hofmannsthal's play follows the version of Sophocles. The action takes place in the courtyard of the palace of Agamemnon at Mycenae, near Athens. It is seven years after the close of the Trojan War. Elektra, wild with grief at the murder of her father, is living in a hovel in the servants' quarters, waiting only for the moment of revenge. When her brother Orestes secretly returns from exile she plots with him the death of their mother and Aegisthus. Orestes finally kills them, with the same axe that had slain Agamemnon, and Elektra in wild exultation dances on her father's grave.

Hofmannsthal and Strauss intensified and made even more frightful the character of Elektra. Lawrence Gilman described her as "incarnate vengeance—a ragged, glaring, dishevelled Maenad: a 'wildcat', says the servants, who screeches and snarls in her execrations, and dwells among the dogs in the courtyard; while to her mother she is a 'puff-adder'. . . . She is a great and terrible figure; never a paltry one."

*Elektra*, like *Salome*, at first made many enemies for Strauss and not a great many admirers. After the excitement of their early performances had died down both operas began to suffer neglect. Even today they are revived only infrequently. What stands in the way of their performance is no longer their subject matter (the music public today, it would seem, is corrupted less easily), but rather their enormous musical difficulty. Both works call for huge orchestras which must conquer scores of great complexity. The leading roles are uncompromisingly cruel. They are exhausting enough in their sheer physical demands, merely as acting parts; added to that are vocal lines that struggle against rather than find support from a rampant orchestra. *Elektra* especially is a score of unparalleled violence. The classic story is told of a rehearsal for its première, at which Mme Schumann-Heink as Clytemnestra was having difficulty in spite of her powerful voice. The composer finally stopped the rehearsal and complained about the orchestra to the conductor, "Louder! Louder! I can still hear the voice of Frau Heink!"

Recent revivals have proven that, given first-rate vocal and orchestral artists who have imagination, intelligence, and sheer physical strength, there is immense vitality and interest in these operas, despite wide inequalities. Strauss constructed them according to the Wagnerian formula. They are music dramas in which the music is controlled throughout by the dialogue and the stage situations. They also employ a system of leading motives, similar to Wagner's. Melodically and harmonically Strauss pushes ahead into a territory of modernism considerably beyond that of Wagner's later works. Melodic lines abound with daring, angular intervals; harmonies are harsh, astringent, with leaps from chord to chord and key to key almost at will. There is a whole new vocabulary of dissonance.

Both operas contain powerful examples of Strauss's gift for portraiture. In

the first the character of the drunken, neurotic Herod is a masterpiece (as indeed it is in Wilde's play); in the second, Elektra herself, an embodied Fury, and her debauched and fear-ridden mother are completely convincing and at times shockingly real. The composer also succeeds in wrapping each work in an atmosphere which adds remarkably to its evocative power. The mood of horror and tragic suspense that broods over the grim, blood-soaked courtyard at Mycenae, and the morbid decadence that pervades *Salome* like a sickening perfume are both created with swiftness and originality. The common fault of these pieces, on the other hand, is a lack of sustained musical style. In neither was Strauss quite able to do what Debussy did in *Pelléas and Mélisande*—create a lyric style and harmonic texture and maintain it consistently. Whether through carelessness or lack of taste, Strauss often mixes material of real originality with some hackneyed Germanic lyricism, some harmonic cliché which spoils the mood and corrupts the integrity of the work as a whole.

His nature being what it was, Strauss could not long remain at work at the black caldrons of tragedy. Two years after *Elektra* he completed *Der Rosenkavalier* (*The Cavalier of the Rose*), the most brilliant and successful opera comedy since *Die Meistersinger*. Strauss's collaborator was again Hofmannsthal, who concocted a story of Vienna at the time of Maria Theresa. It was a splendid libretto, both for its own comedy value and for the opportunity it offered the composer to work in a mood which ideally suited his temperament and his technical equipment.

The opera is an agglomeration of several different musical styles and mannerisms which Strauss fused into a coherent whole. The general form of the piece could be called Mozartean. It is partly a modern music drama and partly an eighteenth-century baroque comedy, with an overture, solos, duets, trios, and finales. Woven into the score are a number of Viennese waltzes in the manner of Johann Strauss, a charming anachronism, because the waltz postdated the Vienna of Maria Theresa by half a century. Finally, the orchestral part is symphonically rich and complete in the manner of Wagner.

Hofmannsthal's story concerns the love affair between the handsome young Octavian and the Princess von Werdenberg (the Marhallin), a woman no longer in the bloom of youth. Surprised one morning in the princess's boudoir, Octavian puts on the dress of a lady's maid. Thus disguised, he attracts the fancy of the middle-aged, boorish Baron Ochs, who has come to ask the advice of the princess about the choice of a rose cavalier. He is engaged to the lovely young Sophie Faninal, and according to the custom of the Viennese nobility he must send his bride-to-be a messenger with a silver rose as a symbol of his love. After the baron has left, the princess broods upon her own fading youth, and finally she decides that Octavian shall be the baron's rose cavalier. Octavian delivers the rose and instantly he and Sophie fall in love. The problem then is to get rid of the baron, who is only marrying Sophie for her father's money. Octavian, in his lady's-maid disguise, lures the baron to a country tavern, and in a riot of tomfoolery shows him up before Sophie's father. The princess arrives in time to dismiss the baron, and in a last gesture of renunciation she smiles upon the union of Octavian and Sophie.

The libretto of *Der Rosenkavalier* suited Strauss because it is a comedy of sentiment—of love and tenderness and affection, as extravagant as the silks and satins, the sachet-laden atmosphere of the luxurious period itself. Liberally mixed with that is pure slapstick nonsense. All through his career Strauss had been a sentimentalist with a flair for suave and, at times, saccharin melody.

The tone poems are full of these lyric outbursts, from the love song in "Don Juan" to the closing section of "Ein Heldenleben". The composer had a hard time resisting them even in *Salome* and *Elektra*. In *Der Rosenkavalier* he could let himself go, unworried about the dignity of his material, sure that it suited perfectly the mood and spirit of his drama. This opera runs over with charming melody, bedecked like an eighteenth-century costume in the sheer luxury and gorgeousness of the composer's most opulent orchestration. The waltzes are now famous in their own right, and they deserve it, for they are the best of their kind after the waltzes of Strauss's namesake.

The composer had two vivid portraits left for *Der Rosenkavalier*. One is the boorish, pleasure-loving baron; the other, the princess. The close of Act I, in which this handsome, passionate, and deeply understanding woman realizes that she is no longer young, is one of the composer's finest pages. The princess knows that for all his avowals she cannot hold her young man for long; she must begin to face the tragedy of age. As she sends him away she knows that it is her own spring which has vanished with the rose.

## VI

The decline in the art of Richard Strauss, which began with the completion of *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1911, is a tragedy never explained. "Decline" is hardly the word, for the failure of his inspiration was not a gradual disintegration; it was as abrupt as the slamming of a door. He did not by any means stop composing. He kept right on producing score after score, exactly as might be expected of a man only forty-seven years old and at the height of a great and vigorous career. For almost thirty years he went through the motions of composition, but what came out was no longer gold but dross.

The first clear manifestation of Strauss's failing powers came in 1915 with the "Alpine" Symphony, his first work for orchestra alone since the "Symphonia Domestica" a dozen years before. Shortly after the outbreak of World War I the composer retired to his country place in the Bavarian Alps and there (in the space of one hundred days, so it was said) he produced this mammoth score. It is supposed to depict the composer's own adventures during a day of Alpine climbing. Considering its physical dimensions and the size of the orchestra employed, this work must be accounted one of the worst failures in symphonic literature, as it is surely one of the biggest bores.

Thereafter Strauss stuck closely to the lyric stage. In 1916 he finished a revision of his opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*; in 1919 appeared *Die Frau ohne Schatten*; followed by *Intermezzo* (1923); *Die Aegyptische Helena* (1928), which was a pretentious failure at the Metropolitan Opera House; and *Arabella* (1933), in the style of *Der Rosenkavalier*, his last collaboration with Hofmannsthal. After the latter's death Strauss wrote *Die schweigsame Frau* (1935), a comic opera after Ben Jonson, with a libretto by Stefan Zweig. By that time Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party had wound itself around the German nation, and Strauss had to drop Zweig, who was a Jew. He took on one Joseph Gregor and with him produced *Daphne* (1938), *Der Friedenstag* (1938), and *Midas* (1939). The ballet "Schlagobers" had been composed in 1923.

It would be difficult to find a more arid collection of works from a once-great master. Only here and there in the sandy wastes is there an isolated oasis in which Strauss was able to find again the crystal waters of inspiration. Some

of these pieces would never have seen the light of even a single performance had it not been for the composer's reputation. Even so, it seemed that they had appeared only to be showered with the vegetables of criticism: "confected out of the dregs of genius", "Strauss gone to seed", "inept", "lifeless", "dull", "bloodless", "senile". Strauss's technical mastery seems never to have deserted him; it was his inspiration, particularly his fund of melodic ideas, which dried up completely.

The tragedy which this record of failure and disappointment represents is more than the tragedy of a single artist. It coincides, in a way which must be more than mere accident, with the decline in the whole art of German music, which in turn is part of the suicide of the Germany that Europe knew before World War I. What forces were at work to bring about that catastrophe are still not wholly manifest. Half a century or more may pass before the dust of the present world upheaval has resolved and the work of historical deduction may begin.

Strauss himself seems hardly to have been aware of what was happening to him. He continued to live the same industrious life, part of the year the hard-working creative artist in the seclusion of his lovely summer home in Bavaria, in the winter a figure of distinction and prestige in the art centres of Europe. After World War I he was lured by the Austrian Government to head the Vienna Opera, and to conduct a number of performances there each season. In part remuneration he was given a splendid villa in which to live. The grounds were part of the park belonging to the imperial Belvedere Palace. In the 1920s the ageing composer, very tall and lean, dressed always in solemn black, could be seen taking his daily walks among the magnificent trees and lakes that had once delighted Prince Eugene of Savoy.

Gradually Strauss's commanding reputation began to suffer a decline corresponding with that of his creative powers. With world reconstruction after 1918 there arose a new generation of composers whose work began to make Strauss's seem old-fashioned. Debussy's impressionism forged to the front, making itself felt upon creative minds in every country. This was followed by the Russian primitivism of Stravinsky, the atonalism of Schönberg, and other schools and cults embracing a neoclassic, anti-sentimental aesthetic which broke at last the long reign of romanticism. In the post-war world of the late 1920s romantic music began to seem as dated as an old hat. For the younger critical minds Richard Strauss was no more than a German Tchaikovsky.

The nadir was reached perhaps in the early 1930s when Strauss associated himself with the Nazi order, returning to Germany to become president of the Reich Music Chamber and chairman of the League of German Composers. In 1935 his resignation was suddenly announced by Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, the reason given being the composer's advanced age. But the blanket of Nazi censorship did not quite smother the truth. Three weeks before, in Dresden, Strauss had produced his opera *Die schweigsame Frau*, with a libretto by the "non-Aryan" Stefan Zweig. Goebbels, fearing the lash of public opinion outside Germany if the opera were suppressed, permitted it to go on, but all the Nazi leaders absented themselves from the première. Strauss was supposed to have earned further disfavour because his son had married into a Jewish family, and because the composer himself had visited Jewish friends in Berlin.

During the next few years the silences closed in upon the composer as the "New Order" began to spread over the politics and culture of Europe. However, with the gradual revival of interest in romantic music and the revulsion

against the excesses of post-war art, Strauss's music regained some of the prestige that it had lost outside of Germany.

On the eleventh of June 1939, a few months before the beginning of World War II, there appeared in the American newspapers a dispatch from Vienna : "Richard Strauss conducted the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra today in celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday. He shared applause with another music lover, Adolf Hitler."

# Stravinsky

1882—



WHEN THE FUTURE HISTORIANS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, TAKING THE LONG view of its happenings, decide upon its pivotal events and circumstances, they will find May 29, 1913, a date to be reckoned with. In the field of modern music it will hold a place as crucial as the political and military crisis that shook the world fourteen months later.

On that evening at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, in Paris, Sergei Diaghilev produced a new ballet, "*Le Sacre du printemps*" ["The Rite of Spring"]. The choreography, as performed by Diaghilev's famous Russian dancers, was by Nijinsky, with scenery and costumes by Nicholas Roerich. Igor Stravinsky composed the music.

The Parisians who attended that première performance could not have come with the intention of creating a fiasco even more scandalous than the one provided half a century before by Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, but they succeeded nevertheless in doing just that. What enraged them and turned them into two warring factions, yelling, hissing, and stamping in defiance, was the music—a score of such cacophonous fury and emotional violence that it struck many listeners with the force of an explosion.

The sensation caused by "*Le Sacre du printemps*" only began with its première. A year later at a Paris performance of the concert version there was such an uproar that Debussy, who was in the audience, rose and pleaded with the noisemakers to let the music be heard. In London, too, the concert version outraged many listeners. Lawrence Gilman records that one man in typically British fashion complained to the newspapers, saying that the score "stood for all the unnamable horrors of revolution, murder and rapine". In New York, Philadelphia, and Boston there were no casualties, but public opinion was violently agitated. At first performances the partisans of the work did what they could to drum up enthusiasm, while members of the Old Guard exercised their ancient prerogative of walking out in droves. To the former "*Le Sacre du printemps*", like a modern "*Eroica*" Symphony, was expected to fling open the doors to an entirely new era in music; to the latter it represented the "blasphemous destruction of music as an art".

Leaving for a moment the ultimate resolution of these doubts and opinions, one thing can be said with certainty about Stravinsky's score. It established Stravinsky himself as the most influential and potent force in music for a space



of almost two decades. This composer became the storm centre of a movement which swept through the concert halls of Europe and America, and which threatened for a time to blow away the last remnants of romanticism itself.

Stravinsky's style, as it appeared in "*Le Sacre du printemps*" and evolved further in later works, was a real threat to the old order. Debussy had wrought a broadening change in musical style and technique, but his impressionism was none the less part of the romantic movement. Stravinsky's creed was definitely anti-romantic. What he stood for is demonstrated in the change that came over the art of music in the decades following World War I, at the time when his influence was enormous. Young composers no longer copied the long-flowing melodies of Wagner and Strauss, the luscious harmonies, the tapestried instrumentation. Instead melodies became angular in the extreme—short, jolting phrases set in metallic orchestrations. Old-fashioned harmony disappeared and dissonant counterpoint and polyharmony, bitter and astringent, took its place. One of the most ancient cornerstones of the musical art, the key centre, was demolished to make way for atonality, i.e. music that is devoid of a recognizable tonal centre. Most radical of all was the new spirit which imbued much of this music—an attitude which disdained emotion for the coldness of tonal steel, and replaced the literary and pictorial aspects of romanticism with abstractions of the strictest and most impersonal sort.

To a certain extent the time itself was responsible for the change in the music art which Stravinsky's work typified. With the end of World War I profound metamorphoses occurred in every phase of modern life and art. Europeans especially who had been through that conflict could no longer bear to look back upon a sentimental and romantic past. Literature, art, and music all reflected the strange and paradoxical obsessions of men who were striving to find reality and at the same time an escape from it. Cynicism replaced sentiment; the machine, man's modern slave, became a new instrument of inspiration in art. With so many ethical landmarks swept away by four years of wholesale killing it is no wonder that many artistic standards went with them, and that anything violently new—whether cubism or atonality—was likely to become the new religion of the moment, provided it had no truck with the old romantic order.

"*Le Sacre du printemps*" was one of the original apples of discord in this revolution in music, and the man who produced it certainly fitted by temperament the movement which he helped inaugurate. Stravinsky is an avowed hater of sentiment in music, a cold little man with one of the best-equipped and most sharply pointed minds in modern art; a man who prefers to avoid emotion whenever he can, and who works instead with the precision of a scientist and the logic of a *juris* doctor.

He was born in 1882 at Oranienbaum, near Leningrad. His father was a noted bass singer in the Imperial Opera in that city, but, like Schumann, young Stravinsky was at first intended for the study of law. Although he received careful instruction in music from the age of nine and was reared in a household where music was of prime importance, he showed none of the signs of the musical prodigy.

According to his own *Autobiography*, Stravinsky hated school; he admits that he never found anyone during those years whom he liked. He was lonely, partly because no one seemed to appreciate his longing for music. His parents, too, were intent only upon educating him so that he could qualify for some post in the Russian governmental bureaucracy (a job no doubt such as Mussorgsky

held for so many years) which would assure him enough to live on. For that reason he was sent to study law at the University of St. Petersburg.

Stravinsky disliked the law, and he finally persuaded his parents to let him take private lessons in harmony. This phase of musical science he found boring and dull, but later when he took up counterpoint he was thrilled immeasurably. When he was eighteen years old he was so interested in counterpoint that he began studying it by himself. By this means (he says) he developed his taste and judgment in music and laid the foundations of his mature technique as a composer.

The study of the law was not a total loss for Stravinsky. In fact it brought him one piece of very good fortune. One of his fellow students was the youngest son of Rimsky-Korsakov, and through him Stravinsky met the famous composer. Rimsky-Korsakov was at that time (1902) in the final phase of his career, and his fame and influence in Russia were great. When young Stravinsky approached him with his first attempts at composition the old master's advice was disappointing—to continue the musical studies, but not to leave the university. Stravinsky, it seems, showed evidence of musical talent, but not enough on which to bank a career.

The young man persisted, however, and within a few years he was receiving instruction from Rimsky-Korsakov himself. His association with the older composer must have been an exhilarating experience. Rimsky-Korsakov was a superb teacher, because he was able to impart his own prodigious knowledge of musical technique with lucidity and perfect sureness. When he began teaching Stravinsky form and orchestration his method was to give his pupil the pages of a piano score of the opera on which he himself was working. These Stravinsky would orchestrate, after which Rimsky-Korsakov would show him how he had orchestrated the same passage. Stravinsky would be required to discover why his master had differed with him; if he could not, Rimsky-Korsakov would explain.

These studies continued for about three years. Meanwhile Stravinsky had completed his law course and had married. He also found time to write his first symphony, which he describes frankly as an imitation of Alexander Glazunov's music, then much admired in Russia. In 1907 he wrote his "Scherzo Fantastique", a tone poem inspired by his study of the life of the bees. He was also working on an opera, *Le Chant du rossignol* (*The Song of the Nightingale*), based on Hans Christian Andersen's story of the nightingale which sang for the Emperor of China. This opera was not completed until 1914, after which the composer converted it into a ballet for production by Diaghilev.

In all these early works Stravinsky is strongly influenced by his master's love of the fantastic and the pictorial, his penchant for lavish orchestral colour. The marks go even deeper than that. For all his love of the extravagantly opulent in music, Rimsky-Korsakov was one of the most reticent of men. An emotional warmth appeared always in the kindly Russian eyes, but as he grew older a patriarchal beard accentuated the facial mask of oriental aloofness and reserve. Stravinsky relates that the older man could never permit himself to make any display of his feelings. This fact is borne out by his autobiography, *My Musical Life*. In that splendid chronicle, which is a mine of information about his own career and the entire Russian musical scene when it was dominated by the Five, Rimsky-Korsakov rigorously excluded details of his personal life that did not bear directly on his music. Only once does the author drop for an instant the mask of reticence—when he relates the lingering illness and death of a five-year-

old daughter. "My poor little girl", a phrase several times repeated, is the only clue to his feelings; but it is more indicative of this kindly man's repressed sorrow than a dozen paragraphs.

It is curious to note how deeply the older man's example affected the pupil. Many years after Rimsky-Korsakov died Stravinsky wrote his own *Autobiography*. It is terse, frank, acidly critical and at the same time stimulating and provocative in its opinions; but the Rimsky-Korsakov pattern is clear in the background. No word of personal emotion enters its cold pages of purely musical reminiscence. Stravinsky's marriage is recorded as follows: "In the autumn I became engaged, and I was married in January 1906." He does not identify his wife; even her name is not given.

In the spring of 1908 Stravinsky wrote a short orchestral piece which he called "Fireworks". One of Rimsky-Korsakov's daughters was being married, so Stravinsky sent the score to his master as a contribution to the occasion. Before it could be delivered the old man had died. It is likely that had Rimsky-Korsakov lived to examine the few measures which comprise "Fireworks" he would have realized that his pupil had suddenly become a master in his own right. Stravinsky's little score is deft and clever and brilliant, with perfect stylistic assurance. The composer's imitation of whirling pinwheels, showering sparks, all the blazing colour, the noise and gaiety of the scene are achieved with few of the more obvious devices. There is a startling vividness in this score, and also subtlety, both in the thematic material and the orchestration.

The loss of his master must have been a serious blow to young Stravinsky. He paid his tribute by composing a funeral march. This work is now lost, having disappeared with other of the composer's effects during the Russian Revolution of 1917. Whatever doubts Stravinsky might have had about his own career were soon dispelled with the appearance of another remarkable man in his life. This was Sergei Diaghilev, a twentieth-century Lorenzo the Magnificent, himself on the threshold of a fabulous career.

## II

No one has ever found the single word adequate to describe the genius of Sergei Diaghilev. Impresario, organizer, manager, entrepreneur—he was all of these, and yet much more. The world remembers him as the man who brought the Russian Ballet to western Europe and the Americas, and that was a fact of prime importance; but his enterprise had ramifications all through the various fields of modern music, art, ballet, and stage decoration.

He was born in 1872, the son of a general in the Russian army. The family were noble and wealthy. Diaghilev himself was an aristocrat to the core—proud, pleasure-loving, imperious in the gaining of his ends and desires. He came to St. Petersburg when a young man in his teens to study the law. Like Stravinsky, his interests lay in music, but he had no success when he tried to compose. He became interested in art, and before he was thirty was the most-talked-of young man in Russian intellectual circles. He founded the provocative art journal *Mir Isskustva*; he organized exhibitions of paintings; he brought shows of the French impressionists from Paris. These were so successful that in 1907 he turned about and brought a large exhibition of Russian art to Paris. His interests in music being as keen as ever, the next step was a logical one. In 1908 he produced in Paris a series of concerts devoted to Russian music. This

brought about the most daring enterprise of all. He decided to bring the Russian Ballet to France. There existed at the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg a company of superlative mimes and dancers, who were bursting with talent but were being held in the grooves of tradition by a reactionary management. Using this group as his nucleus, Diaghilev gave a season of ballet performances at the Théâtre du Châtelet, in Paris in the year 1909. The success of the venture was unparalleled in the history of the modern theatre.

Diaghilev's achievement was far more than the importation of a company of great Russian dancers to western Europe, far more than the exhibition of brilliant ballets. He actually created a new art work. He conceived the ballet as the fusion of three elements—dancing, music, and stage picture—and he demanded that each element in itself be a sound work of art contributing to the whole. In the course of the next twenty years Diaghilev produced more than fifty ballet productions, besides various operas. The superlative nature of his work as a whole can be indicated from the mere listing of the artists who were under his aegis at one time or another during those two decades. The dancers included (among many others) Nijinsky, Pavlova, Karsavina, Ida Rubinstein, Fokine and Fokina, Bolm, Mordkin, Massine, Lifar, and Dolin. The artists of stage design and costume included Benois, Bakst, Roerich, Golovin, Serov, Anisfeld, Soudeikine, Sert, Picasso, Derain, Matisse, Braque, and Robert Edmund Jones. Among his choreographers were Fokine, Nijinsky, Bronislava Nijinska, Massine, and Balanchine. The modern composers who created new works for him included Stravinsky, Ravel, Debussy, Falla, Prokofieff, Tommasini, Poulenc, Auric, Milhaud, Lambert, and Lord Berners.

Diaghilev's own contributions to the productions which bore his name cannot be pointed out with certainty. He was not a creative artist himself; he was neither dancer, choreographer, composer, nor painter. Yet he was able to assert a powerful influence over the creative ideas of other men. He brought various talents together, matching those he believed would create the perfect vision. Usually he gave his associates a free rein in the developing of their own ideas, for he understood artists and he stimulated them to do their best—but over the whole enterprise he ruled with a despotic hand, sure of himself, his taste, and his final judgment.

His greatest gift was the ability to discover new talent. When he first met Michel Fokine, the great choreographer was a struggling young dancer in Russia, trying to assert his revolutionary ideas in the face of the most hidebound reaction of the old-fashioned ballet masters. Diaghilev took him to Paris and set him free. After the season of 1909, Fokine was world-famous. He repaid Diaghilev with creations that now, after thirty years, are the recognized classics of a new age of dancing—"Les Sylphides", "Prince Igor", "Scheherazade", "Carnaval", "Le Spectre de la rose", and "Petrouchka"—while Fokine himself became the acknowledged "master of the modern ballet". Igor Stravinsky, among the composers, was to an even greater extent a Diaghilev discovery, and his effect on modern music was correspondingly profound.

Diaghilev himself was thus a phenomenon as rare as his precise function in the art he sponsored was obscure. He had the organizing ability and the mental energy of an empire builder, and with it the sensitivity of the born aesthete. In some respects he was effeminate; but in appearance he was heavy and masculine—his frame was large, his head enormous, with wide eyes and a heavy mouth, his thick dark hair streaked with a single distinctive thatch of white. He loved fine clothes, and he dressed the part of the impresario even to fur coats

and a monocle. He could be jealous and magnanimous at almost the same moment; he could be aloof, taciturn, arrogant, or charmingly affable as the spirit moved him. He created nothing tangible himself; yet he was such a perfectionist with the work of others that he would threaten to cancel an entire performance if the electricians failed to give him the precise colour he wanted in a single spotlight. Throughout his career he gambled fortunes on his ability to please the public, yet he was a hypochondriac, with a absurd fear of disease. He wouldn't go near anyone who was ill, and in the summer he would ride only in closed carriages for fear of getting glanders from horses.

Some months after the death of Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky's little piece "Fireworks" and his "Scherzo Fantastique" were played at a concert in St. Petersburg. Diaghilev happened to hear them. At the time he was preparing "Les Sylphides" for the first Paris season of 1909, and he commissioned Stravinsky to orchestrate two of the Chopin pieces for that ballet—the opening "Nocturne" and the final "Valse Brillante". Neither Diaghilev nor Stravinsky could possibly have imagined the far-reaching results of that small task of instrumentation, which was the beginning of twenty years of collaboration between them.

Stravinsky did not go to Paris for the historic 1909 season; he remained in Russia working on his opera, *Le Rossignol*. Later Diaghilev returned in triumph, full of plans for a new Paris season of 1910. He again sought out Stravinsky and proposed that the young man write the music for a new ballet, "L'Oiseau de feu" ["The Firebird"]. Stravinsky accepted, but with secret misgivings. He was then twenty-seven years old but he still felt himself an amateur at music, unaware, he says, of his own capabilities.

During the next winter he worked hard at his score, keeping in constant touch with Diaghilev and Fokine. The latter had devised the scenario of "The Firebird" from ancient Russian legends. The story concerns the young Prince Ivan, who finds a marvellous golden bird with flaming wings. He captures her as she is plucking golden apples from a silver tree. When he sets her free she repays him by giving him one of her plumes. The prince wanders into a secret garden to find thirteen lovely princesses dancing and playing with the golden apples. They warn him that he is in the realm of Kastchei, a frightful ogre who turns his victims to stone. The monster and his henchmen swarm out and attack the prince, but he is saved by the power of the Firebird's plume. The bird herself appears and reveals to the prince the secret of Kastchei's power. It is contained in an egg kept in a casket. The prince finds the casket and smashes the egg. Kastchei dies, his victims are set free, and the prince claims one of the princesses.

As Stravinsky finished the various sections of his music he turned them over to Fokine, who immediately composed his choreography. The two men worked in closest contact, with constant supervision by Diaghilev. The finished product was actually the first of a new kind of ballet. Heretofore composers of ballet music had usually worked independently, leaving the choreographer to devise his dances as best he could from the finished score. Even Diaghilev's first ballet productions had been created to music already in existence; often he utilized scores not originally intended for ballet purposes at all. "The Firebird" was a collaboration of the most fortunate kind, with the music governed throughout its composition by the precise demands of the choreography, and even influenced by the stage decoration.

"The Firebird" was first produced by Diaghilev at the Paris Opera, on

June 25, 1910, with settings and costumes by Golovin and Bakst. The success of the piece was immediate, and Igor Stravinsky, before that an unknown composer of uncertain gifts, was on his way to international fame.

"The Firebird" marks Stravinsky's emergence, almost in a single stride, from the ranks of the amateur to an immensely gifted professional. It is a brilliant score, even if it is not marked by the powerful originality which was to come later. Rimsky-Korsakov's pupil shows how well he had learned the lesson of scintillating orchestration. The piece is full of instrumental effects that are both exquisite and bold. The style of this music is intensely Russian, with a strong flavour throughout of Russian folk tune, even when the composer is inventing his own themes. The gorgeously fantastic picture is realized with splashes of splendid colour and, at times, beautifully detailed decoration. Although in style it stems obviously from Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, it goes beyond the work of Stravinsky's predecessors in complexity. The orchestral texture is dense. When first performed it established a new standard of technical difficulty, and many orchestras had trouble with it.

### III

With the success of "The Firebird", Diaghilev was keen for another work by Stravinsky. At first they discussed an idea which had occurred to the composer as he was finishing "The Firebird". It was a weird vision of pagan Russian elders watching a sacrificial dance of death by a young girl. Before he started on the work, however, Stravinsky amused himself by writing a short orchestral piece featuring the piano. He thought of a puppet brought to life and annoying the orchestra with its antics. The composer was staying in Switzerland at the time and Diaghilev came to visit him. When the latter heard the puppet piece he was enthralled. He would not rest until Stravinsky agreed to expand the idea into an entire ballet. With Alexandre Benois, the costume and scene designer, they worked out a scenario for a ballet to be entitled "Petrouchka". Again Fokine devised the choreography.

The action of "Petrouchka" takes place at a Russian fair in a St. Petersburg square, about the year 1830. The street is swarming with people—nurses, children, policemen, gypsies, coachmen, organ-grinders, dancers, drunkards. On one side of the street an old charlatan has set up his booth. He has three puppets—a dancing girl, a blackamoor, and Petrouchka, a clown. By playing on his flute he brings them to life, and they dance for the crowd. Scenes behind the charlatan's curtain reveal the cruel life of Petrouchka. He suffers because he is so ugly and grotesque; he is kicked and beaten by his master, laughed at by the dancing girl, who spurns his love for that of the blackamoor. Tortured by these human feelings which he cannot understand, Petrouchka gives way to frenzied despair, batting his stuffed head against the wall in his agony. Outside the merry-making reaches a climax with the appearance of a man with a bear, and with dances by the nurses and coachmen. Suddenly Petrouchka rushes out. He is pursued by the blackamoor, who splits his head with a sword and kills him. The charlatan quiets the crowd by showing them that Petrouchka is merely a sawdust doll, but as the curtain falls the spirit of the dead clown rises above the booth to mock and terrify his master.

The première of "Petrouchka" took place in Paris on June 13, 1911, with Nijinsky as Petrouchka and Karsavina as the dancing girl. The history of the

ballet changed with that moment. A new conception of emotional depth, of dramatic power, of inspirational freedom—all these entered the ballet dancer's realm. Music, too, had annexed to itself a new realm of creative form, that is, the ballet as a vehicle for serious musical expression on a large symphonic scale. Stravinsky in his *Autobiography* passes on most of the credit for this new form to Tchaikovsky, because of the beautiful music his predecessor had written for "The Swan Lake" and "The Sleeping Beauty" ballets. This seems like undue modesty. Neither composers nor the public had taken ballet music seriously enough. It was always considered a diverting rather than a moving form of art. Tchaikovsky's ballet music, lovely as some of it is, did not change that conception. To Stravinsky must go the real credit for establishing the modern symphonic ballet, as large-scale, intensely serious, and solidly-wrought art.

To Diaghilev must go great credit for his courage in first championing "Petrouchka". Even "The Firebird" had shocked many with its modernity; Pavlova refused to dance the leading role because she thought the music horrible. "Petrouchka" caused many head-shakings and qualms among the conservatives. They found the composer deliberately resorting to "distortion", to purposeful "harshness" and "crudity", which seemed to them gross and wilful as the conceptions of the modernist painters. Today Stravinsky's "distortions" are standard practice with composers everywhere, and "Petrouchka" has become a modern classic.

The composer's urge towards originality forced him out in many new directions in this score. The rhythmic pattern is complex, with the time signature often changing every few bars. The rhythms, moreover, are angular and furiously energetic. The melodies have the raw freshness of folk tunes, but they seldom follow standard methods of development. The composer often uses Debussy's trick of ignoring old-fashioned phrase patterns and sequences, sometimes breaking off his melodies abruptly or leaving them unfinished.

There are some daring harmonic procedures in "Petrouchka", notably the first extensive use of polytonality. In the scene in Petrouchka's room (which was Stravinsky's original puppet piece) the piano has a series of wild arpeggios which superimpose the key of F sharp major over that of C major. Strauss had hinted at this procedure at the close of "Also sprach Zarathustra", but Stravinsky's use is much more elaborate and bold. The score abounds in dissonance. Stravinsky also makes excellent use of Debussy's practice of passing the same chord at will through various notes of the scale—except that where Debussy had used these "glided chords" with discreet softness, Stravinsky slashes them out with immense gusto and emphasis.

The net result of these procedures is to give "Petrouchka" precisely the rawness, the crude colourfulness of the garish scene the composer is painting. The crowd that swarms through the street fair is careless and carefree, dulled by drink or dancing with violent energy, eager, gay, stupid, dirty, and human; the puppets are artificial as their paint-daubed faces, animated by passions, desires, and meannesses, by a pathetic struggle for happiness they cannot understand. Petrouchka himself is a "childlike soul crying in a withered hell". All this is painted by Stravinsky in his score—a living picture limned with incredible vividness and speed.

As ballet music "Petrouchka" exemplifies a basic principle: art once again revivifies itself by contact with life. The dead-hand conventions of the past are ignored; the Watteau-like refinements and artificialities which had ruled the ballet for generations are swept away by this gust of lusty, earthy freshness.

After the success of "Petrouchka", Stravinsky returned to the idea of a ballet of pagan Russia. He went back to his family estate in Russia and called in Nicholas Roerich for consultation. Roerich was both a painter and a scholar, an authority on ancient Russian art. For Diaghilev he had designed the scenery and costumes for the "Prince Igor" dances. The ballet which he and Stravinsky finally evolved was "Le Sacre du printemps", the most notorious and in many respects the greatest of this composer's works.

The full title of the piece is "The Rite of Spring: Pictures of Pagan Russia, in Two Parts". It describes primitive man's worship of the earth and his ritualistic sacrifice for spring's consecration. Part I is called "The Adoration of the Earth", and its various sections describe the Harbingers of Spring, Dances of Adolescent Girls and Boys, a Mock Abduction, Spring Rounds, Games of the Rival Tribes, a Procession of the Tribal Sage, and a Dance of the Earth. Part II is called "The Sacrifice". It begins with an introductory section, the Pagan Night, followed by Mysterious Circles of the Adolescents, Glorification of the Chosen One, the Evocation and Ritual of the Ancestors, and finally the Chosen One's Sacrificial Dance of Death.

The original choreography of "Le Sacre du printemps" was devised by Nijinsky. It did not please the composer, who shared the general opinion that Nijinsky, although a peerless dancer, had insufficient technical knowledge of music for the task of choreography. However, it was not the dancing which caused the near riot at the première of the work in Paris. It was the score—the nerve-assaulting fury of the music and its impact upon ears unaccustomed to this excursion into primitivism—which shocked and angered a large section of the public. Many were willing to admit the powerful originality of the work, but they were fearful that it might be turning the whole art of music in a new direction, away from the pure euphonies and melodic sweetness of the past towards some terrifying domain of sheer noise and violence.

Those who saw the work in truer perspective realized that it was at bottom a work of impressionism, of a new but not necessarily dangerous sort. In its sophisticated primitivism it might be classed as decadent; otherwise it was simply an application of Stravinsky's brutal, angular style to the technique of impressionism. What gave the work an immediate historical importance was the fact that other composers all over the world made a feeding ground of its boldly fresh technical ideas and apparatus.

The orchestration, first of all, is masterly—a *tour de force* which has not been surpassed in three decades of orchestral writing. Stravinsky did not want mere brilliance in this score, and certainly not mellifluous beauty; his subject-matter demanded something far different from that. His score is full of straining horns, trumpets, and trombones, shrill woodwinds, piccolos shrieking in the highest register, violent glissandos in the brass choir, percussion that shakes the very earth. Most of these effects were calculated to shock, but they were nevertheless powerfully evocative of the scene to be painted.

The score also contains some of Stravinsky's best melodic ideas. Most of his themes, although original, have the contours of crude folk-tunes. They are sharp-pointed, pungent, purposely avoiding any hint of sensuous smoothness. All of them have the identity and the staying power which is the mysterious quality of all good melody. They cling to the mind long after the music has ceased. In the entire score there is hardly a measure of orthodox harmony. Dissonance and polytonality abound, with effects of deliberate harshness that set the teeth of the conservatives on edge. Moreover, there is no gliding over



these dissonances by the use of soft strings. As often as not they are roared out with the full force of the brass.

The most extraordinary feature of "*Le Sacre du printemps*" remains Stravinsky's use of rhythm. He set a new standard of rhythmic complexity, with cadences sometimes so involved that the time signature changes with almost every bar—three-eight, two-four, three-four, four-four, five-four, six-eight, seven-eight, etc. The piece abounds in furious energy of a type usually associated with expressions of the primitive emotions, the wild stampings and threshings of zealots, medicine men, and dervishes. Rhythm rises to such paramount importance in this work that it could be said Stravinsky uses it as Debussy did the chord—as an entity in itself, overshadowing melody in importance in the general scheme.

Whatever its enemies once thought of this great work, its place in music is secure, if only for the reason that so much music which came after it has been affected by its mere presence. It provided composers with new techniques; it gave listeners new conceptions of musical beauty. It no longer terrifies. What once seemed like cruel dissonances have mellowed into harmonic beauty as authentic as a diminished seventh. Above all, it is superbly evocative. Its spring has nothing of the warm, sensuous, blossom-laden South; instead it is chill and steely, with bracing winds blowing through it from a land of melting ice. It reeks of the earth, of life that springs eternal from rotting death; of primitive man with his pathetic fears, his abounding energies, his fierce urge to stay alive in defiance of a malignant and unheeding nature.

#### IV

Despite the scandals of its early performances, "*Le Sacre du printemps*" created an enormous reputation for Stravinsky. The work did not become widely known until the years immediately following World War I, and even then its performances were infrequent; but it remained in the music consciousness of its time like some potent and fearsome chemical force. Composers all over the world, some of whom had little knowledge of Stravinsky's aesthetic, copied its outward style, until the post-war concert halls of Europe and America rang with a new and strange music—dissonant, complex, anti-romantic, and at times hideous. Few composers in history have occupied a place of such eminence and power as Stravinsky did during these years, when every note that he composed and every word he uttered was awaited by composers and the music public alike as a pronouncement from Delphi.

After "*Le Sacre du printemps*", however, a gradual and deep-rooted metamorphosis began to affect the creative effort of Stravinsky. Far from carrying on where that shocking work had left off, he veered off in a direction totally unexpected. His work began to reflect a new attitude of mind on the part of the composer and an adoption of styles and forms that seemed totally incongruous with everything for which he had stood. It created a state of confusion among his friends and enemies alike, leaving questions that have remained unanswered to this day.

One phase of this evolution should have been understood by the public more readily than it was. It should have been realized that Stravinsky could not possibly maintain the furious pace of scores like "*Petrouchka*" and "*Le Sacre du printemps*". They were the work of a comparatively young man, and in their vitality are typical of youthful genius. As he grew older Stravinsky

simply had to calm down. Other considerations also impelled him towards more continent forms of expression. Like so many of his fellow artists, his personal life had been completely disrupted by the war. He was convinced that the golden age of great orchestras and elaborate ballet and operatic productions was over, and that the music art in order to survive would have to assume more modest shapes. For more than a decade he produced only small-scale works.

The first of these was "Les Noces" ["The Wedding"], composed chiefly in 1915-16 when Stravinsky was living in Switzerland. It was a time of economic difficulty and emotional turmoil for the composer. He had a wife and four children to house and support, and creating a new home for them in a strange land was no easy matter. Finding a suitable workroom for himself doubled his problems, for he could not compose if anyone was within hearing distance of his piano. Part of "Les Noces" was composed in an unheated lumber room that looked out on a chicken-run. The composer had only an upright piano, badly out of tune; he was so cold that for a few days he sat in an overcoat, fur cap, and boots, his knees covered by a rug.

"Les Noces" is a description of a Russian peasant wedding. The composer originally intended it for large orchestra and chorus. Instead he scaled it down to a medium remarkable for modesty and ingenuity—a group of four solo voices and a mixed chorus of twenty-four, four pianos, and about a dozen percussion instruments. The work is in four scenes, describing in detail the events of the peasant marriage ceremony in all its boisterous, good-natured humour. The music is exceedingly noisy, with vigorously sung or shouted vocal parts, insistent rhythms and pounding accents delivered with much gusto by the battery of percussion and the pianos. The uncouthness of these peasants, their rank healthiness and vigour, the reek of the soil around them, are etched with garish brilliance and originality, even though the listener may grow weary of the insistent racket and the maddeningly nervous excitement.

While he was composing "Les Noces", Stravinsky was also at work on "Renard", a burlesque piece based on animal fables. This was scored for four solo voices and a small chamber orchestra of eighteen instruments. Even more spare in its medium was "Histoire du soldat" ["The Tale of the Soldier"], which required only a clarinet, bassoon, cornet, trombone, violin, double bass, and a percussion player with half a dozen instruments. This work had its origin in the year 1917 when the Russian Revolution put a stop to the income that had come intermittently to Stravinsky from his properties in Russia. He was more desperately hard up than ever. With the assistance of two friends in the same straits he conceived the idea of a small travelling theatre which could be transported cheaply and taken on extended tours all over Europe. Searching Russian folklore, they chose the tale of a soldier who deserts his regiment and tries to bargain with the devil. The little show which they evolved called for a tiny orchestra seated on one side of the stage, on the other a reader who recited the narrative poem, with the actors in the centre.

The score of "Histoire du soldat" is pungent, witty, and ironic in mood. In style it is a distillation of Stravinsky's ultra-modern craftsmanship. It abounds in dissonant counterpoint, polyharmony, and new polyrhythmic effects obtained by mixing several conflicting rhythms in the same measure. The melodic material consists of scrappy, satirical uses of cheap marches, dances, music-hall melodies, and folk-tunes—all distorted by a sophisticated and mordant stylization. For some critics "Histoire du soldat" is one of Stravinsky's masterpieces;

others, while admitting its cleverness, find it repetitious, thin, and tiresome in its self-conscious technique.

Stravinsky had become keenly interested in American jazz during the composition of this work, and one of its tiny dances is called "Ragtime". Later he wrote two more essays in this style—"Ragtime" for eleven solo instruments (1918), and "Piano Rag Music" (1919). Today these works are stale remnants of a phase of American jazz which is long since outmoded. In 1922 Stravinsky wrote a short opera, *Mavra*, based on a story by Pushkin and composed in the style of Glinka and Tchaikovsky. It is a slight work, but it happens to mark a dividing line in the development of the composer's style. It is the last of his works which is based on Russian ideas. The composer had been trying to get away from his nationalism ever since "Les Noces"; with *Mavra* his break with his Russian heritage in art is complete and final.

The change in Stravinsky's style turned out to be far more than a departure from nationalist sources. Up to this time his work had been strongly emotional and pictorial; now he sought to develop a new mode of expression which would be as abstract as the pure formalism of the eighteenth century. This style, he said, reflected his desire to become "a classicist, an objectivist, a constructive artist". His preoccupation with this idea resulted in a long series of works in a neo-classic style. "Pulcinella", a one-act "ballet with song", was based on airs of Pergolesi, the Italian composer of the early eighteenth century. It was produced by Diaghilev in 1920, with designs by Picasso. For this work Stravinsky did not merely transcribe the original melodic and formal ideas; he re-styled them into a thoroughly modern texture. The same year brought forth the "Symphonies for Wind Instruments", a short work composed in memory of Debussy and scored for some twenty instruments of the wind choir. A similar experiment in wind sonorities appeared as the Octet, in 1923. Then came two piano works—the Sonata in 1922, and the Piano Concerto, finished in 1924. In the latter piece the orchestra was made up of woodwinds and brass, but no strings. The composer referred to this ensemble as the "harmonic orchestra", as something entirely different from the "symphonic orchestra". He announced that "strings and piano, a sound scraped and a sound struck, do not sound well together; piano and wind, sounds struck and blown, do". Early in 1925, when Stravinsky made his first appearance in America, conducting concerts of his own works, he also played the solo part in this piece.

Almost without exception these works in the neo-classic style were received by the general public with bewilderment and complete disappointment. Their dryness and objectivity, their preoccupation with odd sonorities, their thin, abstruse unemotionalism—it seemed as though every drop of sentiment had been wrung from them—left audiences coldly hostile. Stravinsky himself made the issue more perplexing with various public statements in which he announced with vehemence his disdain of the old order. He inveighed against excess of emotionalism, against "sentimental twaddle", too opulent orchestration, the injection of personality, individuality, and temperament into music—in short, the entire apparatus of romanticism, bag and baggage. Instead, he had embraced the pure abstractions of eighteenth-century music, with its simplicity, lucidity, and impersonal restraint. The man who had created the supreme modern Dionysian orgy in music, "Le Sacre du printemps", announced that he was in truth an Apollonian.

"I dislike cajoling the public!" he exclaimed. "It inconveniences me. The crowd expects the artist to tear out his entrails and exhibit them."

It should be profitable at this point to seek some closer contact with Stravinsky the man, and to learn from the shell of personality more of what the inner nature of the artist might be.

## V

Even from the meagre accounts of him in the early days of the Diaghilev association it appears that Stravinsky never impressed anyone with shyness or lack of personal distinction. He is a small man, slightly built, and with the quick, vital mannerisms that indicate excess of nervous energy. Picasso, who was his intimate friend, made several revealing drawings of him which show a large nose and full, sensuous lips; but the eyes are small and slanting like a Tartar's, and rather cold and penetrating behind pince-nez. (In later years he adopted American-style horn-rimmed glasses.) Picasso accentuated Stravinsky's hands. They are large and muscular, hands of strength with no trace of softness. Clearly there is little of the effete or the feminine in this man's make-up.

Stravinsky may be small in physical size but his energy, from all accounts, is enormous. He belongs to the fraternity of great talkers. David Ewen, in describing an interview with the composer, declared that he exhausted his listeners by the zest and volubility of even his casual conversations. Unable to sit still, he paced the room, smoked incessantly (he once had a serious attack of nicotine poisoning), expressed himself vehemently, agitatedly, and with complete assurance. Few composers since Wagner have been more opinionated. Janet Flanner described his "cyclonic temperament" and called him an "inventive, contradictory, complicated man, bent on comprehending everything immediately and from the ground up". This writer also found that he has "the drawing-room charm of the verbal virtuoso", that he could be witty in German and French as well as Russian, and that like all great talkers he hates to be alone.

A composer's opinion of the works of other men is often one of the most valuable clues to his own artistic purposes. Stravinsky has been candid with his own views, but for the most part they have only served to leave his admirers and enemies alike bogged down in confusion. In one case at least he runs true to expectations: he loathes Wagner and everything that arch-emotionalist stands for. Once Stravinsky went with Diaghilev to a performance of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth and came away feeling that he had been in a crematorium. Beethoven he admires for his instrumental and formal mastery, and in spite of the general "sentimental attitude" towards his works. Schubert and Brahms leave him cold, but to Donizetti and Bellini he has given the highest praise. He believes that the world has yet to realize the intrinsic greatness of the opera *Norma*. He has also praised Karl Maria von Weber, Gounod, Czerny, and, of course, Mozart. His most incongruous affection, the one that has left his ultra-modernist disciples gasping in bewilderment, is his avowed passion for the music of Tchaikovsky. How this squares up with his anti-sentimental, anti-romantic viewpoint is something no one has ever been able to explain with any degree of conviction.

Stravinsky may be opinionated, but he has a right to be, for he has informed himself on many subjects that appeal to the modern intellectual. He has studied the composers of the past and present with a thoroughness that would shame many a pedagogue, and he appreciates art and literature. From the nature of many of his opinions he might seem like a sceptic. On the contrary,

he is a profoundly religious man, who goes regularly to the Russian Church and prays daily before an icon in his study.

Stravinsky's personal life is carefully ordered. For years he composed with the regularity of an office worker, and at a desk that is a model of neatness. His manuscripts are like Wagner's—almost as perfect as engraving itself. At one time he wrote them in several different coloured inks. He loves fine clothes, dresses with care, and indulges in occasional odd affectations. For years he has subjected himself to a daily regimen of exercise.

Shortly after World War I, Stravinsky established a home in Paris for his wife and four children. He lived there for almost twenty years, becoming a French citizen in 1934. The life of Paris had a special appeal for him. His many friends in Diaghilev's group congregated there; so did many of the newer composers who were following Stravinsky in the moulding of post-war modernist music—including the group of French composers known as "the Six". French culture in all its aspects impressed him. As he went through the metamorphosis by which he tried to throw off his Russian heritage and escape being a purely nationalist artist, it was towards French concepts that he obviously gravitated. The neo-classic æsthetic which he finally embraced has many characteristics of Gallic restraint, symmetry, elegance—an art based more on the intellect than the emotions. It is noteworthy that one of Stravinsky's friends in Paris was his French contemporary, Maurice Ravel, and that Ravel, another admirer of eighteenth-century models, also made extensive use of its style and procedures in his works.

It is noteworthy, too, that Picasso, another personal friend of Stravinsky's, was also carrying on experiments of a kindred nature in the field of art. The whole French scene had been violently agitated by the modernist movement and its exploitation of abstractions in painting, and new cults, schools, and movements had grown up like mushrooms. Picasso, as one of the founders of cubism, had carried on his famous experiments in geometrical structure, in which the search for the abstract and the absolute had reached its zenith. One of the chief characteristics of this new art was what must be called, for lack of a better word, "distortion", that is, violations of the normal lines and forms of visual objects in order to make them more expressive, more startling, more in harmony with some recondite design.

If Stravinsky had been a poseur or a dilettante it would be easy to make out a case for his neo-classic style as an imitation of these practices which were shaking the world of art, and a desire to do something new and different at any cost. That he was influenced by them is certain, but he was chiefly operating from the inner convictions of a very strong nature—from predilections which he insists had taken root in the earliest days of his career. He became a neo-classicist for the reason that he had nothing more to say in the old romantic-nationalist-emotional style.

At first he had many followers. Composers who had rushed after "Le Sacre du printemps", "Petrouchka", and "Les Noces", trying to outdo his frenetic dissonance and earthquake rhythms, now scrambled on to the bandwagon of his new classicism. The old forms were dusted off once more—sonatas, rondos, passacaglias, concertos, fugues, variations. The enormous orchestras of the past gave way to experimentation in queerly constituted instrumental groups, performing the new dissonant counterpoint. Stravinsky's style in this period became predominantly linear and contrapuntal. Whereas in the period of his great ballets his music had been dense, complex, and thickly con-

structed, it now took on the more tenuous, flattened contours of old-fashioned polyphony. The themes became busy, burbling imitations of Bach and Handel, with many of the old clichés of baroque figuration, and of course a stern avoidance of anything suggesting nineteenth-century lyricism; rhythms were less ferociously violent than in the previous period, but they were combined, broken up, or even jazzed to avoid any hint of regularity; orchestrations were dry, crackling, and percussive, with sombre neutral colours predominating, and no hint of richness for its own sake. At first hearing it seemed that these pieces were an odd mixture of Bach and modern jazz, but even that description proved not wholly apt. They were in reality dry stalks, lacking both the melodic sap of great eighteenth-century music and the vibrant life of the modern dance.

Music has seldom had a more clear-cut case of an artist rendering his effort sterile by over-preoccupation with technique and method. Once again this was art trying to feed upon other art rather than upon vital experience. No one can question Stravinsky's honesty of purpose and his bravery in this abortive attempt to re-create eighteenth-century values in music. He was definitely on the right track in his efforts to get away from romantic excesses and to bring back into vogue a more continent mode of expression. But it is clear now that he was unfortunately the wrong man for the task. For one thing his hatred of emotionalism drove him to an extreme of dryness and abstraction. He imagined that, by using eighteenth-century matrices, he could throw emotion overboard entirely. In this respect he was actually running directly counter to the practices of the great composers of that age. Men like Haydn and Mozart tried to inject as much emotion and sentiment and lyric beauty into their music as they possibly could, and in spite of the elegant restraints which were the conventions of their time.

An even greater obstacle in the way of Stravinsky's success with this style was a fundamental lack of melodic inventiveness. This is the most serious weakness in his entire armour. From the moment he began to ignore his Russian heritage his thematic material showed signs of deterioration. In the neo-classic stage the weakness becomes glaring. Here he puts himself in competition with Bach and Handel, Haydn and Mozart—all of them prodigious melodists. No matter how cleverly he manipulates their formulas and imitates their designs his music dies on the vine for lack of good thematic ideas. It is another proof of the inexplicable power of melody, the mysterious life-force which is the motor of all music that endures. It is interesting to note that Stravinsky's best themes are apt to occur when he is expounding some strong rhythmic effect. His superlative rhythmic sense, so dominant in the great ballet scores, seems to germinate melodic ideas. In the later music, when he avoids a too dominant rhythmic pulse, his melodic ideas become correspondingly flaccid.

## VI

In the midst of his neo-classic period Stravinsky made several important departures from pure abstraction and from the smaller forms. In 1927 he finished "*Oedipus Rex*", for large orchestra, chorus, six solo voices, and a reader. This work he characterized as an "opera oratorio". It was intended as a surprise tribute to Diaghilev on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his theatrical career, and was originally performed in Paris on May 30, 1927.

"*Oedipus Rex*" is a mixture of ideas, sources, styles, and idioms. The text,

which follows the tragedy of Sophocles, is in Latin. It was originally prepared in French by Stravinsky's friend, Jean Cocteau; but the composer had it translated because he wanted to use an ancient tongue. He rejected Greek for Latin. "The choice," he said, "had the great advantage of giving me a medium not dead, but turned to stone and so monumentalized as to have become immune from all risk of vulgarization." There is a narrator, however, who explains the action in French. For the main musical framework of his piece the composer used the old oratorio style of Handel. There is considerable use of recitative-like declamations and solos in the florid Handelian style, contrasted with solidly built choral numbers. The composer strives for the grand style, and in the main he achieves it. The work is a mass of tonal stone, grim and grey as ancient masonry, but its archaism is achieved by all the tricks known to modern music technique. The melodic lines are severe, granitic, supported frequently by forbidding polytonality. Of lyric sweetness, harmonic or instrumental velvet, there is absolutely no trace. Even the brighter keys are avoided for a pervading greyness of tonal colour.

"Oedipus Rex" has moments of great power, when its evocation of the ancient tragedy is convincingly achieved; but as a whole it is a spotted and uneven effort. The outstanding lack, here as in so much of Stravinsky's later work, is a constant flow of new thematic ideas worthy of the subject. Here, possibly, may be found the real reason for this composer's peregrinations among past musical styles and forms. One begins to suspect that this procedure is simply a subterfuge to compensate for his melodic poverty. Unable to create new themes which are original, suitable, and with the outstanding stamp of genius, he falls back upon some style of the past. By this means he is free to imitate the melody of this other age, transforming it with ultra-modern harmony, polytonality, dissonant counterpoint, and various other modernist devices. The procedure has the added advantage of seeming very learned and eclectic, but it can also be a subconscious refuge for a creative mind which has lost the genuine creative spark. In "Oedipus Rex" many a choice melodic banality can be exposed merely by disentangling it from its polytonal accompaniment and playing it alone.

In the year 1930 the Boston Symphony Orchestra was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary, and its conductor, Serge Koussevitzky, asked Stravinsky to join several other famous composers who were commissioned to write new pieces in commemoration of the event. Stravinsky obliged with his "Symphony of Psalms" for orchestra and chorus. The piece was written during that year, but with many interruptions. The composer at that time was at the height of his prestige, and he made frequent tours of Europe playing and conducting his own works. The first performance of this symphony took place in Brussels, a few days before the Boston première of December 19, 1930.

The "Symphony of Psalms" is in three movements, and it utilizes verses from three of the Psalms, in the Latin text of the Vulgate. The orchestra indicates the composer's insistence upon new instrumental sonorities. It employs large woodwind and brass sections, with two pianos and a harp, but no clarinets; the strings consist of 'cellos and basses, but no violins or violas.

In its general character the work is severe and sombrely archaic; it is stylized to the point of stiffness, mystically austere, ascetic. From it arises at times a vision of early Christian art, with its primitive outlines, its flat distortions. For Paul Rosenfeld it recalls "the mosaics in a Byzantine church". Its workmanship is complex but finely drawn, with mosaic-like repetitions of short figurations

and small designs, all adding up to a kind of subdued splendour. There is something more Byzantine in this work than its mystical evocations. It leans heavily upon design and craftsmanship for its own sake, but its emotional content is rarefied and cold. Even the cumulative splendour of the Psalmist's words in the closing section, "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in His Sanctuary; praise Him in the firmament of His power"—even these words of wild celebration remain in Stravinsky's transmutation curiously passionless. True, they are among the most effective pages in the work, but the music does not begin to exhaust the power and beauty inherent in the words. To dissect this score is to find it full of mannerisms and devices of technique, but short of genuinely new ideas. The effective touches are worked hard, sometimes exhausted by repetition. As in "Oedipus Rex", modern craftsmanship is too often needed to disguise a lack of sound thematic framework.

"Oedipus Rex" and the "Symphony of Psalms" brought about an important change in the career of Igor Stravinsky. With them his popularity with the public and his influence upon contemporary composers both suffered a serious decline. The great ballets of former years had been maintaining his prestige during the neo-classic period; now the comparative failure of these two big works left doubts about his ultimate stature as an artist. The major body of the music public had never admired his neo-classic, anti-emotional aesthetic. When it became apparent that this was not merely a passing phase with the composer but a permanent part of his musical thinking, he began to occupy a more and more isolated position in contemporary music. The death of Diaghilev in 1929 accentuated the fact that a great creative influence in the early development of the composer had long since been on the wane; now it was removed for ever.

A variety of pieces continued to come from Stravinsky's pen, some of them stage works and others purely instrumental. In 1927 he had written "Apollon Musagètes", a ballet in the classical manner, based on episodes from the Greek mythology and scored for string orchestra. It had been commissioned by Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, the noted American patroness of music, and was first performed at one of the festivals which she sponsored at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. "Le Baiser de la fée" ["The Fairy's Kiss"], another ballet, was composed in 1928 for Ida Rubinstein. The story was taken from Hans Christian Andersen's tale of the Ice Maiden, and the music is in the style of Tchaikovsky. "Persephone" (1933) is a "melodrama" also based on the Greek mythology, with text by André Gide. It is scored for orchestra, chorus, a tenor singer, and a speaker. The latter part was taken at the Paris première in 1934 by Ida Rubinstein, who also mimed the title role. "The Card Game" (1937) was composed for the American Ballet and was first produced at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The scene is a card-table at a gaming-house, and the piece describes three deals in a game of poker, the characters being various cards in the pack.

Of the instrumental works, the "Capriccio" for Piano and Orchestra dated from 1929, with the Violin Concerto following in 1931, the Duo Concertant for Violin and Piano in 1932, and the Concerto for Two Pianos in 1935. The Concerto in E flat major for sixteen instruments (called "Dumbarton Oaks" from the name of an estate near Washington where it was first performed) came in 1938, and in 1940 a Symphony in C major, written to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Stravinsky had left his home in Paris and moved to America. For a time he lived in Cambridge, Mass., and was occupied with a series of lectures at Harvard. Later he moved to California and



established a home in Beverly Hills, where he composed the Symphony in C major.

Almost all of these works have met with frigid receptions by the public. The exceptions are the "Capriccio", a brilliant showpiece in the style of Weber, mixed with Bach, Liszt, and modern jazz; and "Persephone", the Gide melodrama. The latter work has been performed too infrequently to win wide public favour, but it has been praised by discerning critics as a justification of the composer's later style. The legend of Persephone's descent to the underworld and her joyous return to earth is described as music of coolly beautiful, almost ascetic restraint, but with a depth of feeling seldom found in this composer's recent work. Stravinsky's eclecticism is fulsomely demonstrated in a score like "The Card Game", which is a busy little work, through which flit many ghostly ideas of the past—mannerisms of Tchaikovsky, Verdi, Delibes, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and modern jazz. It is a pale score that sounds like a refined burlesque, in which the jokes are all delicately proper. The Symphony in C major is more attenuated and dry, a studied hybrid of eighteenth-century elegance and modern sophistication. The classical symphony is evoked by the use of many of its oldest clichés—the scale passages, harmonic progressions, rhythms, and cadences—all solemnly reset in a framework of modernism.

It is unlikely that the puzzle of Stravinsky's stylistic evolution can be convincingly explained for the present generation of music lovers, or his place in music history evaluated as yet with any degree of certainty. The present age is still clinging to the immediate past from which he has recoiled violently. Stravinsky himself is well aware of the fact that he has lost his public. His *Autobiography* states candidly, "They cannot and will not follow me in the progress of my musical thought. What moves and delights me leaves them indifferent and what still interests them holds no further attraction for me." He himself must bear most of the blame. Had he sufficient creative strength, the marvellous vigour which once seemed to come to him as it came to the legendary hero Ilya Mourometz—from the soil of Russia itself—had he retained this strength there is no telling what his place might be today. Instead, he has been unable to force his ideas to conclusions of unmistakable power and certitude. That future composers will go to Stravinsky for important ideas is beyond doubt. His mastery of instrumentation, for example, and his bold use of new orchestral combinations and unhackneyed sonorities are bound to have an effect upon the procedures of coming generations. The ballets of the earlier years remain secure, but the rest wavers uncertainly, dependent upon the next stage in music's evolution. The artist, himself, unable to force that stage into being according to his own plans, has been a vagrant and unsatisfying spirit:

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born.

# *Sibelius*

1865-



THE GREATEST COMPOSER PRODUCED BY THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES SINCE DIETRICH Buxtehude was born in Finland. The year was 1865, and there is special interest in the fact that Sibelius is thus an exact contemporary of Debussy (born 1862) and Richard Strauss (born 1864). Both of these men reached the apex of their creative powers in the years immediately preceding World War I, as they attained their fiftieth year. Thereafter the effort of both declined and they added little that was permanent to the sum of modern music. At the same period Sibelius was only entering his artistic maturity with his most enduring works yet to come. The purely geographic influences upon human temperament are thus too marked in the case of Sibelius to pass unnoted. As man and artist he is a typical product of the North. There is something almost glacial in his strength and dignity, his aloof detachments, the slow evolution of his creative thought. Sibelius was well past sixty before his music began to gain a world-wide appreciation. He could well afford to wait. The erosions of time had worn away the work of two generations of lesser men; but the solid, granitic foundations of Sibelius' symphonic works remained at last like monuments carved in mountainsides.

Despite the elemental force of much of his music there is nothing primitive about Sibelius the man. On the contrary he is a modern intellectual in every sense, having enjoyed the cultural background and education, the cosmopolitan experience, and the best technical training that any artist might crave. Much of this he owes to his native land. In his childhood Finland was still a grand duchy of Russia and under the political domination of the czars. For centuries the country had been a buffer state between Russia and Sweden, but like Poland she had maintained an aggressive independence of spirit in the face of terrible hardships. Though much of her culture came from Sweden and her political institutions were enchained by czarist despotism, Finland was able to create a race of men in whom physical and mental hardihood were combined with a proud sense of nationalism and a thoroughly modern intellectual capacity. Sibelius came of age in just those years when Finland was throwing off the political and cultural domination of her neighbours and was striving for a place among the independent nations of the world.

Jan Sibelius was the son of an army surgeon, and from his earliest childhood he had every advantage that a family of culture could offer. He was well grounded in literature, both of antiquity and of the present, and he absorbed the epics, legends, and sagas of Finland herself. At the age of nine he was taught to

play the piano, but even before that he had been trying to compose. When he was fifteen he began to study the violin, loving it so passionately that he wanted to become a virtuoso. The strange reasoning processes which so often motivate parents of musically talented children operated once again in Sibelius' case: it was decided that he must study the law. He entered the Helsingfors University as a law student, but fortunately was also permitted to take courses at the Conservatory of Music. In 1885, when he was in his second college year, he resolved to become a composer. A few years later he studied with Ferruccio Busoni, when the Italian pianist-composer was a young man giving courses at Helsingfors.

When he was twenty-four Sibelius won a scholarship with a government award of fifteen hundred marks. He went to Berlin to study. The fact is significant. Half a century before he would in all likelihood have gone to Italy, but now after several centuries the centre of gravity in European music had definitely moved to Germany. Sibelius went there in the days of the great Germany, barely two decades after the unification, when the culture of the country had at long last ripened; her science had become famous, her commerce and industry were thriving, her scholarship was a model of thoroughness and her music the envy of the whole world. Germany was the most powerful state on the Continent, and already the most arrogant. Kaiser Wilhelm II, young and dangerously headstrong, had just ascended the throne. The tremendous tensions of nationalist pride and ambition were tightening all over the Continent. Another quarter century and the pressure valves would burst.

Sibelius took advantage of German pedagogy in its most rigorous forms, with courses in counterpoint and fugue; later he went to Vienna, to study with Robert Fuchs and Karl Goldmark, both cronies of Brahms. Germanic teaching, however, stifled the young man, and he decided that it was too hidebound. He returned to Finland, coming home with a splendid education and a broad culture, the advantages of travel, and special training in the art for which he had talent. He was a favourite son returning to the land of his birth, his future hanging in the balance of fortune.

Finland had not long to wait. He indicated his artistic preferences and his ambitions by producing a huge work called "Kullervo", a symphony in five movements for chorus, orchestra, and soloists. It was based on the *Kalevala*, the national epic of Finland, a collection of myths and legends as old as the Finnish people themselves. In the closing years of the nineteenth century a nationalist feeling was rampant in Finland, and young Sibelius left no doubt about where his sympathies lay in the struggle against Russian domination. "Kullervo" was never published, the composer later considering it immature and imperfect. The same year (1892) he produced a short work which was to be his real introduction to the world of music. This was the tone poem for orchestra, "En Saga". Sibelius wrote it at the request of the conductor Robert Kajanus, who wanted a piece that would not be too long or difficult for the conservatory orchestra. Later Busoni was so impressed by "En Saga" that he performed it in Germany; thereafter it carried the name of Sibelius all over the world. A few years later appeared a group of four "Legends" for orchestra, one of which was the famous "Swan of Tuonela". Tuonela, according to the composer's inscription on the piece, is "the land of death, the hell of Finnish mythology". Another short tone poem, "Finlandia", was written in 1899 for a patriotic stage show in Helsingfors, and it aroused the people to such demonstrations that performances of it were later banned by the czarist government.

At the turn of the century Sibelius was thirty-five. Finland was proud of him and had already granted him through the vote of her Senate an annual pension of two thousand marks. Nationalism in music was on the rise; every country in Europe was eager to rival the achievement of the brilliant Russians. During the next forty years the Finnish composer produced an enormous quantity of music in almost all the musical forms. He wrote seven symphonies, more than fifty orchestral and choral works, incidental music to a number of plays, a violin concerto, dozens of piano pieces, more than a hundred songs, and a number of miscellaneous works of various types.

This music has had a curious history. At first it seemed that Sibelius and his fame were due to rise in a steady curve. Busoni had sponsored him in Berlin at a notable series of concerts devoted to the "modern music" of the day. In 1905 he went to Berlin at Busoni's invitation and conducted his newly composed Second Symphony with unusual success. Berlin then being the music capital of the world, these accolades should have carried great weight, but they did not. During the next few decades recognition for Sibelius's music seemed to go so far, and then to stop. When he made a trip to America in 1914 the composer was amazed that his fame had preceded him. Concerts were given in his honour in New England, and he received an honorary degree at Yale. For at least fifteen years after that, however, America practically ignored him. Through the far greater part of his creative life Sibelius remained a secondary—almost an obscure—figure in the unfolding of twentieth-century music. Outside of Finland he was known chiefly as the composer of a few early and essentially inferior scores—"Finlandia" and "Valse triste". Of his greater tone poems and symphonies little was known even in the most advanced music centres of America and Europe.

There is no mystery surrounding this long-delayed recognition. The chief cause was the same one which kept Brahms's music so long under a cloud. Sibelius's mature works were composed at a time when the world of music was intent upon the development of new and revolutionary movements. First came the impressionism of Debussy, which began to gain favour in the first decade of the century. Then followed the ultra-modernism of Stravinsky and the atonalism of Schönberg. For more than thirty years composers, conductors, the public, and all the forces of publicity were intent upon the development of these new trends. Sibelius, who had almost no connecting link with any of them, had to stand aside and wait. His music did not even enjoy the favour of those who preferred the later romanticists. Compared with Strauss, Franck, or Dvořák, Tchaikovsky, Scriabine, Rachmaninoff, or the other Russians, he was considered dour and bleak, too severe and difficult to be worth the effort of knowing. Most of the conductors avoided his music. It is significant that of the numerous German conductors who visited other countries during those years almost none showed any interest in Sibelius. They came instead laden with second- and third-rate scores from Central Europe—music which showed only too plainly the impoverishment of the once-fertile German musical soil.

Sibelius had to wait until the various revolutions had played themselves out. By 1930, Debussy's innovations were long since established as part of the new language of music; Stravinsky's great days were over; Schönberg and the cult of atonality had proved too extreme to cut deeply into the public's affections. Audiences began in fact to manifest a sudden revulsion against the excesses of these movements. After two decades of polytonality and polyrhythms, of dissonant counterpoint and atonality, the pendulum swung sharply backwards.

The public wanted to hear melody again; it wanted recognizable key centres, simpler rhythms, even diatonic harmony. The more astute conductors, sensing the trend, began to cast about for new music that would satisfy these demands. That was when Sibelius came at last into his own. Interest in his music took a sudden rise in England and soon spread to America. By the mid-1930s the Finnish composer's music was the most eagerly played of all contemporary scores, and the most widely praised.

## II

Sibelius has been an enormous producer in a large and varied field, but his international reputation rests upon a comparatively few works. Many of the smaller and less consequential pieces have never been heard outside of Finland. In English-speaking countries interest centres largely upon a few of his tone poems, his Violin Concerto, and his seven symphonies.

Certain general observations can be made about this music at the outset. Viewed historically, one of its most striking features is its lack of a pronounced Wagnerian influence. Even though Sibelius was a young and impressionable artist at the height of the Wagnerian tide, the German's music repelled him. He disliked its extreme sensuality, its richness, and the fevered neuroticism that motivated so much of it. For Sibelius this dislike was a piece of good fortune which saved him many creative agonies in his coming struggles for originality. Even though he is clearly a romantic composer, markedly so in these early formative years, his interests lay away from sentiment and sensuality. By far the most powerful of all external influences has been his love of Nature, a passion which moves him as it did Beethoven, Thoreau, and Audubon. The composer himself declared, "It is true that I am a dreamer and a poet of Nature. I love the mysterious sounds of the fields and forests, water and mountains. . . . It pleases me to be called an artist of Nature, for Nature has truly been the book of books to me. The voices of Nature are the voices of God, and if an artist can give a mere echo of them in his creations he is fully rewarded for all his efforts."

Coexisting with this composer's love of Nature is his absorption in the legendary literature of his native country. Most of the long list of his tone poems, from "En Saga" to "Tapiola", have sprung from an impulse to illustrate in music scenes from the Finnish mythology, against the background of the magnificent natural panorama that unfolds in his Northern land. For many of the legends the composer's favourite source has been the *Kalevala*. One of its runes inspired "Pohjola Daughter", a tonal painting of the mythical maiden who sits upon the rainbow, spinning. Another is described in "The Origin of Fire" (for baritone solo, male chorus, and orchestra). In this work, Ukko, the counterpart of Zeus in the Northern mythology, dispels the darkness of the world by restoring sunlight and warmth. "Luonnotar" (for soprano solo and orchestra) is the story of the Creation, as told in the *Kalevala*. "The Song of Vaino", "The Return of Lemminkainen", and "The Swan of Tuonela" are based on runes from the same epic. "The Oceanides" is an impressionistic tone picture of the sea, while "Tapiola" derives its name from Tapio, the Finnish god of the forest.

To dominate material of this type an artist would be required to develop a style of breadth and magnitude. Sibelius indicated his capability for the task as early as "En Saga", produced in his twenty-seventh year. His style is unmistakably masculine, full-blooded, and sinewy; the soft lyricism of the South is

not for him. His handling of melodic lines is clearly in the romantic tradition, but the melodies themselves are usually unsensuous; sometimes they are harsh, angular, and jagged, or based on the daring repetition of single notes; but always they are distinctive. Sibelius himself has declared flatly that he has never used a single folk tune in any of his music, but many of his melodies have a strong folk flavour. As a harmonist this composer has remained on the conservative side. When he was a young man and most of his contemporaries were running to extremes of chromaticism, he avoided those hectic colours. Since then he has been clearly aware of the modern harmonic inventions of Debussy, Stravinsky, and Schönberg, but he has used their devices sparingly. Generally speaking, his music retains a diatonic cast. It alternates between a sombre richness and a deliberately harsh and dissonant quality, matching the mood of his melodies.

The Sibelius orchestration also runs to the darker colours and the less sensuous timbres. Few composers have made such conspicuous use of the deeper registers—in the 'cellos, basses, bassoons, trombones, and tympani. The wide contrasts in mood in this music—the grim, brooding, the explosive outbursts of savage despair, the unexpected shifts to dreamy tenderness, sadness or resignation—all these are translated into orchestral sound with sureness and distinction. In an age of expert orchestrators Sibelius has kept himself in the forefront, without ever being accused of virtuosity for its own sake.

### III

Resting like massive piers under the edifice of his half century of creative effort are the seven symphonies of Sibelius. Among all his works these have been most widely praised, and they are likely to remain the representatives of his best thought. They span a quarter of a century of his vigorous and assured creative years, the First dating from 1899 when he was thirty-four, and the Seventh appearing in 1925 when he had reached the age of sixty. An Eighth Symphony has supposedly been in the course of construction for at least a decade, but the composer, severely taciturn about his own work, has refused any report on its progress.

If a symphony were to be described today as a product of the late nineteenth century, strongly flavoured by the styles of Borodin, Grieg, and Dvořák, and with hints of Tchaikovsky in its mellow slow movement—one would naturally expect a piece of old-hat romanticism which would have little chance of survival in a modern world. Sibelius's First Symphony, in E minor, has precisely those ingredients, and yet it has been successfully revived in recent years and is now a solid and respected member of symphonic repertoires. Its virtues are those of good melody, a brilliantly articulate orchestration, and an honest attempt on the part of the composer to avoid the clichés of lyric overripeness, of romantic bombast and pretentiousness.

The same ruggedness and honesty of purpose characterizes the Second Symphony, in D major, composed three years after the First, in 1902. Its four-movement form is also orthodox; it contains plenty of dramatic passion and is fulsome with melody; the composer indulges in an imposing finale in the typical manner of romantic symphonies (he had courageously avoided it in his First)—and yet the work contrives to be original. The best feature of this symphony is a fine slow movement. It avoids the soft contours of romantic melancholy for

sombreness and austerity. Its unfolding is unorthodox, with moody, fitful changes of pace and style. Over it hovers an evocation of Northern landscapes, of deep-shadowed lakes and black primeval forests.

Apart from the immense vigour that is latent in both these symphonies, their most encouraging feature is their melodic material and the way it is handled by the composer. Only a few of Sibelius's themes hint of the romantically commonplace; the rest are distinctive, even strongly original, with a sharpness of contour unlike any others in the music of their time. Moreover, the composer is experimenting with them, trying out new ways of development and exploitation. One of these experiments is noteworthy. Instead of the traditional method of introducing the main themes of a movement in their complete form and later breaking them up into small parts for their "working out", Sibelius reverses the procedure. He begins by using small pieces of melody, sometimes no more than vague thematic suggestions. These are tossed about, from instrument to instrument, choir to choir, often taking on size as they progress, finally to form themselves at some climactic moment into the full-blown melodic idea. Sibelius did not originate this process (Gerald Abraham, points out its use by Borodin), but he soon began employing it so extensively that it became an integral part of his mature symphonic style.

Following close upon the first two symphonies came the Violin Concerto, in D minor. This work, composed in 1903 and revised in 1905, was neglected by violinists for more than twenty-five years, until it finally emerged as one of the best concerto pieces in modern music. The causes of the neglect lay chiefly with the public. Virtuoso violinists were unwilling to expend the effort of conquering its many technical difficulties for audiences which were left cold by what they then considered dour and forbidding music, unwarmed by sentiment. Sibelius's concerto is something of a rarity among works for this instrument. It might be called a man's violin concerto. It contains few of the soft sweetnesss, the feminine sentimentalities usually associated with the violin. Instead the instrument is surrounded by an orchestra part that is powerfully wrought, forthright, even brusque, with few concessions made to the soloist. The first and third movements abound with energy, putting the player through a severe test of skill and endurance. The slow movement is strongly reminiscent of Brahms.

As he stood at the turn of the century with two fine symphonies and this concerto behind him, and the reins of maturity now firmly in his hands, Sibelius had come to the end of a road. He had a transition to make, one which would determine his ultimate worth as a creative artist. His problem was precisely that of Debussy, Schönberg, Stravinsky, and all the other important composers whose careers were opening up in the years prior to World War I. He knew that if he was to grow he would have to make some kind of break with the romantic past, or at least find some way of escaping from its now-frozen conventionalities. The path that he chose was not as original or extreme as those of Debussy, Schönberg, or Stravinsky. Sibelius had few of the revolutionary impulses that guided these men. After the Second Symphony he began cautiously to feel his way, and the first results are evident in his Third Symphony, composed in 1904 and 1905.

It is interesting to note that Sibelius, exactly like the three other composers mentioned, took his first step by scaling down his instrumental forces and lowering the emotional voltage of his ideas. Obviously he had realized that it would be an empty proceeding to go on composing symphonies with increasingly large structures, more complex instrumentation, and more precipitous

finales. Romantic music (especially the German school) had practically exhausted itself in that direction. Sibelius's Third Symphony, in C major, is remarkable for the comparative restraint of its style. It is strong, meaty music, with occasional hints of elemental power; but the rousing melodramatics are entirely absent. The prevailing mood is bright and cheerful, with a pastoral serenity hovering over much of it. The work contains only three movements.

The Fourth Symphony, in A minor, completed in 1911, is the masterpiece of the entire set. Few works in modern music have received such praise, and there is a widespread belief that this is the greatest symphony yet produced in the twentieth century. Early performances were for the most part failures. It was almost twenty years old before the praise of a few discerning critics (chiefly Cecil Gray in England and Olin Downes in America) forced it to the attention of conductors and finally to the public.

The Fourth Symphony is almost unique in the way it compresses a maximum of emotion—poignant, deeply introspective, and agonized emotion—into the sparest of musical frameworks. Gray's description has been widely quoted. He writes that "the Fourth is the outcome of a process of sheer starvation, of a fakir-like asceticism and self-denial". It is "gaunt, spectral, emaciated almost; the question here is no longer one of superfluous flesh, but of any flesh at all—the very bones protrude". Audiences still accustomed to the overblown and over-developed symphonies of the later nineteenth century could not at first grasp this music, which said precisely what it meant and no more, and from which every unnecessary note had been culled. It contained nothing of sensuous beauty, but instead a great deal of emotional substance. There was a vague suggestion of impressionism about it. At first hearings it often seemed completely disjointed, its ideas broken off abruptly or left hanging in the air; only later did the closely knit structure and perfectly logical evolution of the piece become plain. Similarly, the harmonic schemes of this work at first repelled many listeners. It seemed that the composer was using dissonance with cruel perversity. The sudden leaps to unrelated keys sounded as if the music were flying off its track. After twenty years of polytonality and dissonant counterpoint, it appears now that Sibelius's use of these devices was both discreet and logical.

For all its remoteness and its compressions the Fourth Symphony belongs among the most hauntingly sorrowful works in modern music. In this respect the composer has provided an object lesson in the uses of restraint to achieve great ends. He avoided all the breast-beating of the past, and the tearing of passion to tatters—to the accompaniment of a hundred roaring instruments. The orchestral forces are used for climax hardly more than twice in the entire symphony, once in the superb Largo, in which the wild grieving of the music almost bursts its instrumental bonds.

#### IV

Since the sudden emergence of Sibelius's music to popularity and recognition the world has literally beaten a path to this composer's door. Writers, critics, publicists, and musicologists have pursued him in their efforts to find out more about the man who could create the stupendous tone pictures like "Tapiola" and the lugubrious, introspective philosophies of the Fourth Symphony. So much was written about him in the years preceding World War II that almost every reader of newspapers and magazines must now be familiar with the external



facts of his life and personality. They know his forbidding appearance—the great muscular frame upon which sets, as if in stone, the impressive head with its round bald dome, austere eyes, and straight-line mouth. Like his music, Sibelius the man leaves an instant impression of strength, of resolution, of a character which will neither bend nor warp. There is nothing sour about his personality; on the contrary, he has the genial cordiality of good breeding. At the same time he is, about himself and his music, completely aloof. Those who talk with him come away convinced that not even the members of his own family have ever penetrated the inner walls of the man's personality.

In 1904, when he was approaching his fortieth year, Sibelius moved to Jarvenpää, about an hour's ride from Helsingfors. As if deciding that, tree-like, he must have roots, he settled down in a modest house—"what amounts to a log cabin set in the trees", is Olin Downes's description. Here the composer has lived for the past forty years, and here most of his mature work has come into being. This home, with its lovely natural surroundings of white birch forests, has provided him the isolation his nature and his art demand; at the same time it is not too far from the cosmopolitan Finnish capital, where Sibelius has been a familiar figure in his favourite restaurants and at concert and operatic performances. The composer is a family man, the father of five daughters who have provided him with a host of grandchildren in the passing years. At home and among friends he is described by Cecil Gray as "courteous, affable, hospitable almost to excess, a true grand seigneur". He is a lover of cigars, and a wit who likes good conversation. His capacity for fine whisky is said to be worthy of his Norse ancestry. One thing alone seems to cause the composer fear—appearances in public at which he is likely to be honoured. Conducting his own works was generally more of an ordeal than a pleasure, and the international acclaim that poured upon him in the past decade seems to have left him only acutely embarrassed. Interviewers who have tried to sound him out about himself or his work have invariably found him either evasive or silent.

So far no one has been able to discover definite personal reasons for the deep strain of melancholy that runs through a work like the Fourth Symphony, although there have been years of serious crisis in the composer's life. Just before the composition of that symphony Sibelius suffered from a persistent ear and throat ailment, and for a time he was haunted by the fear of becoming deaf. Then an even worse possibility—cancer of the throat—drove him to Berlin, where he underwent a whole series of operations by a throat specialist. For several years, until both the ailment and his fears were dispelled, the composer was gloomy and depressed.

In 1918, when the repercussions of the Russian Revolution finally reached Finland, Sibelius had one of his most harrowing experiences. The Finns had declared their independence from Russia, but before the issue was decided by the close of World War I the country became a battleground for three factions—Finns, Russian Communists, and White Russians. For many weeks Sibelius was kept virtually a prisoner in his own house, which was repeatedly searched by the Communists. A number of his acquaintances in the neighbourhood were murdered, and the composer expected to be shot at any moment. He was working at the time on his Sixth Symphony, and neither terror nor intimidation could keep him from his task. Finally he was taken from his house and imprisoned for more weeks in what had been a lunatic asylum. The city was under siege and food was short. The composer, though he lost forty pounds and was weakened and emaciated, continued doggedly at his work. Even a

final titanic artillery bombardment that lasted thirty hours filled him not with fear but exhilaration. He later described it as a marvellous piece of orchestration that ended in a "fortissimo I could never have dreamed of".

The symphonic progress of Sibelius after his Fourth Symphony must have been a matter of considerable difficulty. His work indicates a steady struggle for originality and an escape from hackneyed conventions. He began his Fifth Symphony, in E flat, in 1914 and the next year it was performed in Finland. Then the composer withdrew it and made extensive revisions, before it was finally published in 1921. In this symphony the composer continues along the way he had chosen after the Second Symphony. The style is terse and to the point, the structure remarkably compact. It is in three fairly short movements, what might have been a scherzo being telescoped into the first movement. There are moments of emotional excitement, but the gloom and heartbreak of the Fourth Symphony are absent. The work is bright in mood and pastoral in feeling. Some critics have even called it "sunny"; nevertheless, there are faint undercurrents of pathos, as in most of this composer's work. The end is a splendid and triumphal summing up, but even this (paradoxically) is restrained, the orchestra being subject to a rigidly enforced economy.

Melody again plays its part in establishing the Fifth Symphony as a work of lasting value. This music is not lyrical in the old-fashioned romantic sense, but like Brahms's music it always sings. The composer never pushes his themes with bold, underlining orchestrations. They seem to develop naturally and with a minimum of conscious effort or effect. In this respect the composer is clearly like Brahms. The harmonic schemes are solid, almost conventional. Occasional rudely contrived modulations are far from being uncouth. They have much the same aesthetic purpose as the rough contours of modern sculpture, keeping the subject matter elemental and close to the earth.

The Sixth Symphony, in D minor, composed in 1923, is another study in attenuation. Even the mood of the work is restrained, almost passive, having no hint of the gloom of the Fourth Symphony or the serene melodiousness of the Fifth. There is a certain dryness about its ideas, and a feeling that they are repeated and "worked" a great deal. The public has not cared for this work; with the Third Symphony, it remains comparatively neglected. Possibly conductors have misjudged it, or perhaps the disappointment of audiences can be attributed to a habit of expecting too much. When a work is labelled "symphony" listeners are still apt to be disappointed if the results are not on the impressive side. The Sixth Symphony is one of Sibelius's smaller canvases, something akin to a water-colour or an etching, whose secrets lie in refinements and elisions.

Any suspicion that the creative processes of this composer might be drying up was quickly dispelled in 1925 with the appearance of his Seventh Symphony, in C major. The work is in a single movement, and it is a giant among modern musical structures. In it there is nothing of attenuation and little of restraint, but instead an unexampled weight and density of ideas. From the opening bars is felt the immense strength of the composer's grip. Into this single span is crowded enough material to fill four average movements. It is by turns lyrical, heroic, pastoral—a great synthesis of Sibelius's styles and idioms, his moods and ideas and creeds. Like the Fourth Symphony, this work has been universally praised, and a favourite epithet used to describe its magnificent amplitude is "Olympian".

## V

At the present time a final evaluation of Sibelius's music can hardly be made with certainty. The belated praise that has been heaped upon him in recent years has in many cases gone overboard. He has been called the greatest symphonist since Beethoven, an accolade which is as likely to harm him as it did Brahms. If his music cannot yet be weighed it can at least be classified. Sibelius of the tone poems is a nationalist, the brother of Borodin, Grieg, Dvořák, Falla, Rachmaninoff—though he is a more powerful creator than any of these. As a symphonist he clearly belongs with Brahms and César Franck. Like them he occupies an almost isolated place in his age as a master of the classic forms; like them he is at heart a romantic. His is a modified form of romanticism, restrained by personal austerities and even mildly affected by modernist procedures, but it belongs in the nineteenth-century tradition nevertheless. For this reason his music has not greatly appealed to or affected the younger composers who have the music of tomorrow as their responsibility. Like Brahms's, Sibelius's art is retrospective; its effect on the future can hardly be extensive. This does not detract, of course, from the stature of this composer. The creator of masterpieces like the Fourth Symphony and the Seventh Symphony does not need a personal following or a group of imitators in the future to maintain his reputation. Modern music itself, however, is unquestionably the loser when so powerful a creative force leaves so little upon which the men of the future may build, and that—considering the state of music at the present time—is a tragic fact.

The belief is widespread today that the art of music is in a serious decline. Many signs point to a disintegration that has been taking place since the beginning of World War I. One of them is the failure of modern composers to produce a continuous flow of important new music. That is not to say that first-rate works have not appeared in the twenty-five years since World War I, but compared with the large number of great works produced in the previous quarter century the falling off of creative vigour becomes apparent. Even more revealing has been the failure of certain individual composers to fulfil expectations. Twenty-five years ago the most potent creative minds in modern music seemed without doubt to be those of Igor Stravinsky and Arnold Schönberg. It seemed certain that as these two men reached their maturity they were bound to take over the direction of this art and propel it steadily ahead and into new fields of adventure. The influence of both has been great, but the personal accomplishment of neither has lived up to its promises.

The case of Stravinsky has been discussed in detail. In some respects even more might have been expected of Schönberg. Certainly what he attempted was the more difficult task. This Austrian composer (he was born in Vienna in 1874) has suffered a kind of martyrdom in the way he has maintained his position as a prophet of extreme modernism in the face of disdain, abuse, and even ridicule from the listening audience. Schönberg began as an imitator of Wagner and an exponent of heavy post-Wagnerian sensuousness and sentiment. From that position he gradually moved until, in 1909, he made his "complete break with the past", to establish his new creed of atonality. What the composer tried to do was one of the most daring assaults upon tradition that this art has known. He tried to destroy the key centre, which is literally one of the foundation stones of music. Music as we have known it for centuries is based on the twelve tones

of the chromatic scale. Each of these tones produces two keys, major and minor, making twenty-four keys in all. Briefly stated, what Schönberg attempted was to write music which would owe no allegiance to any one of these keys. It would be a mixture of all of them which sounded like none of them. Thus no one of the tones would dominate as a key centre; all twelve would have equal importance at all times. To express this idea of music written *without tonality*, the new words "atonal" and "atonality" were coined.

The development of this bold project was carried on in a curious and unexpected way. For his purpose Schönberg devised a system of dissonant counterpoint. He had always enjoyed an amazing facility in contrapuntal writing; now his music became dense masses of polyphony in which the traditional devices of development—fugue, canon, inverted canon, cancrizans, from the simplest to the most bewilderingly complex—were the basis of growth. The melodies themselves were conditioned not by the old rules of melodic writing but by new ones—rules of an extreme, not to say eccentric, sort. His themes were all completely angular, consisting of wide leaps of every possible interval. Even in the vocal parts they often jumped beyond the limits of an octave. Scale lines were conspicuous by their absence. At one stage of the composer's progress he tried to abolish all development or repetition of his themes. They would appear briefly and then be dropped. Later he went to the opposite extreme in which all the old principles of unity and variety were scrupulously observed, all melodic material being derived from the same few basic thematic germs.

The result of this new technique was a bewildering and in part a completely baffling musical phenomenon. The composer had set out by trying to break down and free himself from certain basic laws of music. He ended up by binding himself in a wholly new, arbitrary, and self-imposed set. For Schönberg would permit no compromise in his scheme. From his atonal style all consonant chords, all suggestions of tonality were strictly barred. It soon became apparent that this music suffered from a killing monotony—the monotony inherent in the overuse of dissonance. Schönberg had succeeded in destroying tonality, but he did not gain thereby (as many at first believed) entrance into some broad new field of music development. What he had done was only to invent, in effect, a twenty-fifth key. By remaining rigorously atonal his music became just as colourless and monotonous as if it had remained always in any one of the regular keys.

Other phases of the composer's style turned out to be equally fruitless—at least in his own hands. One was the building of chords based on intervals of the fourth, instead of the third. Another was the use of *Toneihs*, or "tone rows", to replace themes and motives. All twelve tones of the chromatic scale were arranged in a certain arbitrary order. One of these rows could be used forward, backward, or inverted, but in no other way in a given piece. Later this law was relaxed to permit the sounding of the notes of a row simultaneously as a chord. Another innovation was the *Sprechgesang*, or "song speech", which was exploited in Schönberg's most successful score, "Pierrot Lunaire". In this "melodrama" the soloist's vocal lines must be half sung, half spoken. Schönberg's two stage works, *Erwartung* (1909) and *Die glückliche Hand* (1912), brought forth new ideas for the synchronization of music and stage lighting, as well as individual handling of orchestration.

After more than a quarter of a century this music remains—for the general music public—in the field of abnormality. The opinion persists that it is abstruse and involved to the point of perversity, that it is frigid as so many

exercises in pure mathematics. It is music that has been removed from contact with life and taken into the laboratory, into the world of passionless formulae and experimentation in the abstract. Indeed, in the struggle of modern composers to reach abstractions as far removed as possible from the emotional bases of romanticism, the instrumental works of Schönberg have arrived at the point of absolute zero. As for the stage works, they touch another extreme. Schönberg here deals with human values and feelings, but they are the emotions of the psychopathic ward, the abnormalities of personal suffering and hallucination. Over them hangs a pall of decadence, not to say degeneration.

Obviously such an art would have difficulty in gaining a hold upon the affections of other men. It belongs in the realms of the freakish, the abnormal. This does not mean that Schönberg has not been an influential force in music. He has in fact had many disciples; but so far only one, Alban Berg (1885-1935), the composer of the operas *Wozzeck* and *Lulu*, has made a success of applying the master's principles. *Wozzeck* is the most original and powerful work for the lyric stage since Strauss's *Elektra*. Berg, it is noteworthy, had one gift which is conspicuously lacking in his master—a gift for creating genuinely interesting melodic material. That has been Schönberg's failing from the days of his Wagner imitations—a shortness of melodic breath, an inability to conceive themes which bear the imprint of originality and distinction.

That Schönberg will continue to influence musical procedure is certain, just as Stravinsky in his later phases will affect other composers who will extract ideas of value, using what they want and rejecting the rest. It is impossible to pass from mention of these two men without making a final point of contrast, that is, the difference between their procedures and that of a man to whom Stravinsky owes a debt—Mussorgsky. The two modern composers have spent most of their years exploiting technique for its own sake, and in solving problems in musical abstraction that are carefully removed from the realm of human emotion. Mussorgsky, the powerful creator who pointed the way to much modern procedure, cared little for technique *per se*. He was original and daring not for the purpose of solving musical problems, but because he was driven to it by an overwhelming urge to express in his music the emotions of the human heart, the spiritual agonies which music before him had not been able to express.

## VI

The hostility that has existed for two decades between composers of modern music and the listening audience can hardly be interpreted as a sign of health. That composers themselves have begun to realize that something is wrong is clear from recent developments. Following the public's clear manifestation of its feelings in the sudden vogue of Sibelius's music, many composers (even some of the most extreme) have retreated from their far outposts. Most of the new music being performed today is clearly a compromise. It is best exemplified in the work of the young Russian composer Dimitri Shostakovich, who has succeeded Sibelius as the popular favourite. Shostakovich's work is shrewdly eclectic. It mixes extreme dissonance, chromaticism, and the most obvious diatonic clichés; its melodies are simple as folk tunes, harshly angular or as lush as Tchaikovsky's. Its counterpoint is free but never involved; rhythms are sharp and clean. Orchestrations are brilliant. Even the appearance of many of these scores is as open and uncomplex as those of Brahms. Above all, this is emotional music—unabashed and unashamed.

It is true that in much of this newer music there is a definite retreat from originality. A composer cannot be a compromiser and an innovator at one and the same time. If this condition is unhealthy then the composers cannot be made to bear all the blame. They are living in a world which has made the creation of an original and highly personal musical style a problem of enormous difficulty. The dissemination of music today is so rapid and widespread, through radios, gramophones, public performances, and printed publications, that the creative artist is swamped with music from all sides. The ideas of other men crowd in upon him constantly; he finds it almost impossible to maintain an isolation necessary for the development of a creative thought of his own.

At the same time the scientific world which on the one hand has served him so handsomely, preserving and disseminating his work by mechanized processes, has failed him on the other. With one exception, it has produced no new musical instruments of outstanding worth. Except for minor improvements, the composer today is working with the same instruments that Berlioz used a century ago. The exception is the electrical organ, and even this has been developed largely in imitation of its old prototype. Modern composers themselves have been slow to realize how much the old instruments have actually handicapped them. Stravinsky is one of the few who have sensed it. His experiments with new instrumental sonorities are obviously an attempt to give his ideas the benefit of an entirely new medium. In all probability he did not go far enough. When the public hears the old instruments it also hears, subconsciously, the old music it has loved so well. Much of the new music might have a far better chance if it were written for new instruments that cannot draw the mind of the listener to nostalgic remembrances of the past.

Various other aspects of the musical scene today force the conclusion that much of the vigour has gone out of its creative processes. The most noticeable, and by all odds the most melancholy, is the state of German music. It may well be that we are witnessing not just the decline but the end of the great movement that began with Heinrich Schütz. In three hundred years this stream has never been so shallow. Since the beginning of the decline of Richard Strauss in 1911, the direction of music has been in other hands. A single artist, Paul Hindemith, may be the only one left who has anything to say of lasting value. Sad, too, is the end of Italian music, although this has been obvious for a far longer time. From the middle of the nineteenth century Verdi kept it going almost singlehanded. Art has the attributes of living organisms; it lives, grows, and dies. Deaths must be expected in art as in life, but it is not pleasant to witness the extinction of marvellously productive creative impulses that have existed in the world since the days of the Renaissance.

Meanwhile, the fate of music seems to have passed to other countries—to the Russians and the French. Both have produced great men. In these dark satanic times prediction is a hazardous business. Since the rule of war is now the rule of life it may be that our best advice can come from a man of battle—from General Lee, who found himself sustained by these words:

The truth is this: the march of Providence is so slow, and our desires so impatient, the work of progress is so immense, and our means of aiding it so feeble, the life of humanity is so long, and that of the individual so brief, that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave and are thus discouraged. It is history that teaches us to hope.

THE END

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

RATHER than print the standard type of bibliography which aims to acknowledge every source consulted, I am giving only a selected list, which I believe will be of more value to the average reader. The literature of music is now enormous. Inevitably, there is much duplication. There is also a considerable mortality among books once believed indispensable but now outmoded in style and opinion. Even certain foundation stones of musicology like Spitta's *J. S. Bach*, Jahn's *Life of Mozart*, and Thayer's *Beethoven*, though priceless as source books, are heavy going for the modern reader.

The following list contains books which were valuable in the preparation of the present volume. Many of them were sources of special profit and enjoyment. I do not think any of them should be neglected by a reader who wants to gain a broad grounding in the subject of music.

Charles Sanford Terry, *Bach, A Biography; The Music of Bach* (Terry is the acknowledged modern authority on Bach. Everything he has written on the subject is worth reading); C. Hubert H. Parry, *Johann Sebastian Bach*; Albert Schweitzer, *J. S. Bach* (a classic of scholarship and aesthetics); Harvey Grace, *The Organ Works of Bach* (technical, but still a fascinating study).

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